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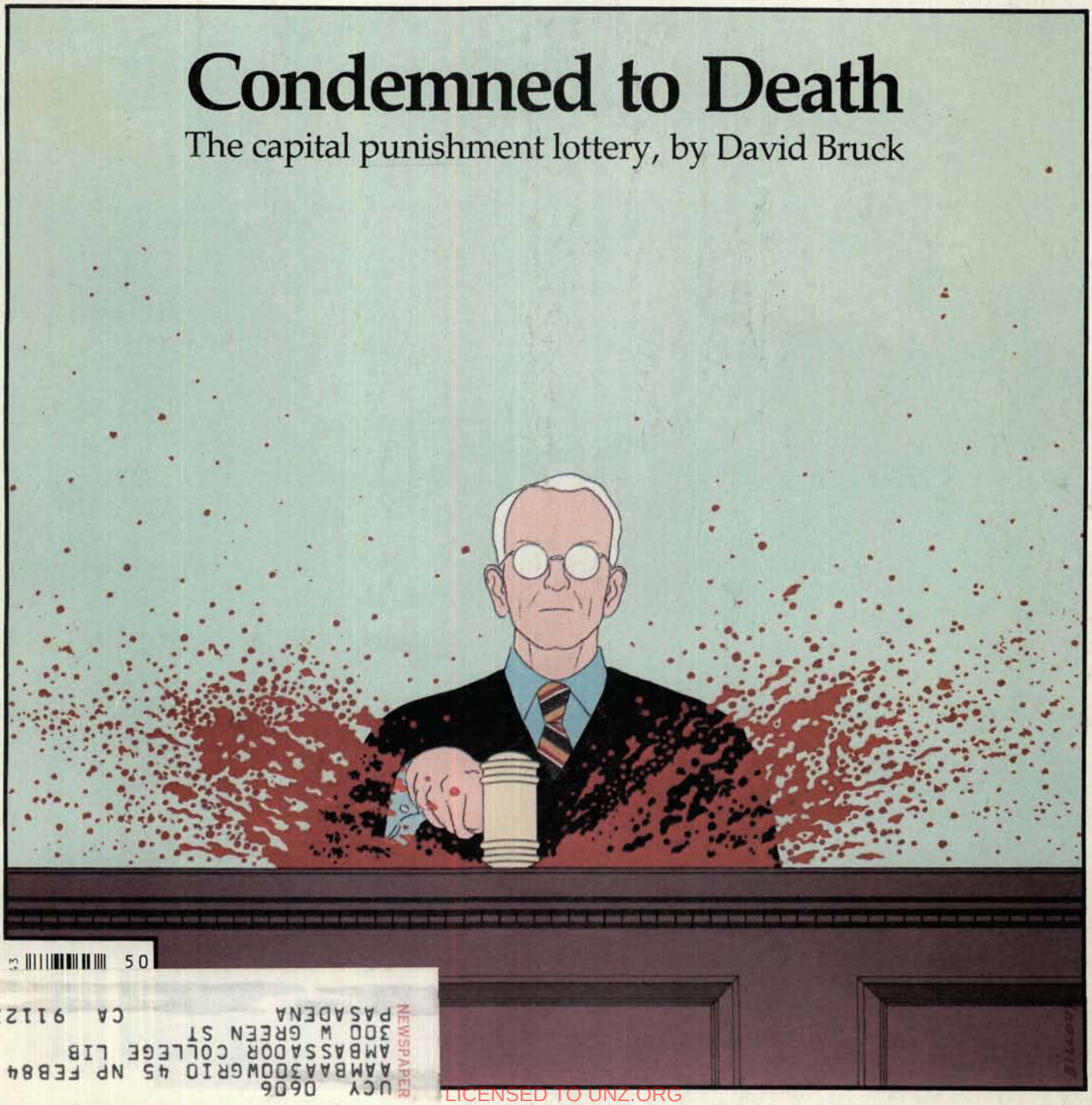

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

FOUNDED 1914 — *A Weekly Journal of Opinion* — ISSUE 3,595

WASHINGTON, D.C. — DECEMBER 12, 1983

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Volume 189, Number 24, Issue 3,595, December 12, 1983. (Printed on November 22, 1983.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated January 10 & 17, July 18 & 25, August 15 & 22, and September 19 & 26) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. Advertising (202) 331-9787. Leadership Network advertising (212) 684-5500. Yearly subscriptions, $45; foreign, $67; Canada, $55. Back issues, $2.00 (includes postage & handling).

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(ISSN 0028-6583). Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC. Indexed in Readers' Guide and Media Review Digest. Available on microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. **Subscribers:** Please send all remittances, changes of address, and subscriptions inquiries to **Subscription Service Dept., The New Republic, P.O. Box 955, Farmingdale, NY 11737-0001.** For subscription problems call **800-645-9559** (In N.Y. state 800-732-9119).

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CORRESPONDENCE

SANDINISTA SUCCESS

To the editors:
What on earth does Shirley Christian ("The Other Side," TNR, October 24) mean by this phrase, "the ongoing debate in Nicaragua over whether the Sandinistas really defeated the National Guard or just conned the Western world with their democratic façade"?

There has never been any question that the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional inflicted military defeat on Somoza's Guardia Nacional. As a journalist in Nicaragua from 1979 to 1981, I can assure you that there has been no such debate over this point in that country.

The illogic of this sentence may be simply due to carelessness, or maybe it is born of the confusion the White House has sought to create by insisting that the Sandinistas have "stolen" the Sandinista revolution, a contradiction in terms as blatant as that of the Johnson White House when it revealed to us the news that the Vietnamese had "invaded" Vietnam.

JOSEPH K. SKINNER
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Shirley Christian responds:
Mr. Skinner is mistaken. The small Sandinista Front was able to come to power in Nicaragua by making itself the beneficiary of a remarkable confluence of events outside its direct control, including the assassination of newspaper publisher Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal, the inability of the Carter Adminstration to make up its mind about how to deal with the resulting crisis, and the almost universal repudiation of Anastasio Somoza. This is borne out by the fact that today in Nicaragua the Sandinista leadership, particularly the prolonged war faction, is busy revising the history of the war to give the "revolutionary vanguard" the dominant role. Mr. Skinner contributes to that effort.

THE LEBANON COMMITMENT

To the editors:
Your discussions of American policy in Lebanon and Grenada ("The 'Peacekeeping' Fraud" and "White House Watch: Something Less," TNR, November 14) are interesting, but ultimately disappointing in the way they deftly avoid grappling with the tough questions at issue. It is easy to agree that we should have policies "grounded in a strategic understanding of our interests," but which of our many conflicting interests, and under what conditions, should one interest be elected over another? Should "America's stated commitment to the principles of democracy and nonintervention" take precedence over "American credibility," and the protection of American citizens? Though it may be desirable for the Reagan Administration to have a strategy it currently lacks, is it really better to have a right-wing strategic design rather than none? Although you hint that Syria may have "legitimate security interests" in Lebanon, your failure to discuss what those interests might be leaves the reader with an uninformed, simplistic view.

ROBERT A. MONZINGO
Huntington Beach, California

To the editors:
Your editorial on Lebanon implicitly advocates an American-Israeli war on Syria, the Kissinger option. It saddens me to read this call to battle without any mention of the danger of a confrontation with Russia. At least Reagan and company are not as foolish as TNR editors.

I can't but think that the unstated reason for your war talk is the desire to see Israel's enemy bloodied. You would have American policy serve Israeli ends, but even Israel has learned the costs of belligerence. Without losing sight of who the first invaders of Lebanon were or of the real threat to its sovereignty, a case could be made that Israel's 1982 invasion and occupation created the setting for the murder of the Marines.

We have paid enough in more ways than one for Israel's security. Let it make peace and give back the Golan Heights or fight its own wars.

MILTON MCDONALD
Fayetteville, North Carolina

EDEL'S CATHER

To the editors:
In his review of Phyllis Robinson's book on Willa Cather ("The Man in the Woman," TNR, November 14), Leon Edel mentions a "perceptive analysis" of Cather, published in 1953, and credited by him to E. K. Brown. In fact that book was actually co-authored by Mr. Edel, after the death of E. K. Brown. In fairness, he might have mentioned his own role in the completion of a book that he praises.

It may also be worth noting that Cather's homosexuality, which Edel dwells on in his comments about Robinson's book, was not mentioned at all in his own "critical biography" of Cather. Is he now making up for his own glaring omission of thirty years' standing?

RAY ROBINSON
New York, New York

Leon Edel responds:
I did indeed complete Brown's book, which he left all but finished when he died. The book is his, not mine. And I clearly said that it lacked the benefit of our new sexual attitudes: "Brown was writing before the gay liberation and he himself had been reared in Victorian reticence." My own views of Cather have been made clear in my published essays.

INTEREST GRIPE

To the editors:
A consistent theme of Walter Mondale's record in public life has been his opposition to "special interests" and his promotion and defense of the "public interest." TRB ("On the Fritz," TNR, November 14) chose to ignore Mondale's long record in office (which paralleled John Glenn's for many years) and to rest his case, instead, on a single client relationship from Mondale's brief career in private practice. There might have been some twisted logic in a comparison of Mondale's record in private practice with Glenn's management of Holiday Inns or Reagan's movie roles, but not even TRB, I trust, would suggest choosing a nominee or a President on that basis.

ELIOT R. CUTLER
Washington, D.C.

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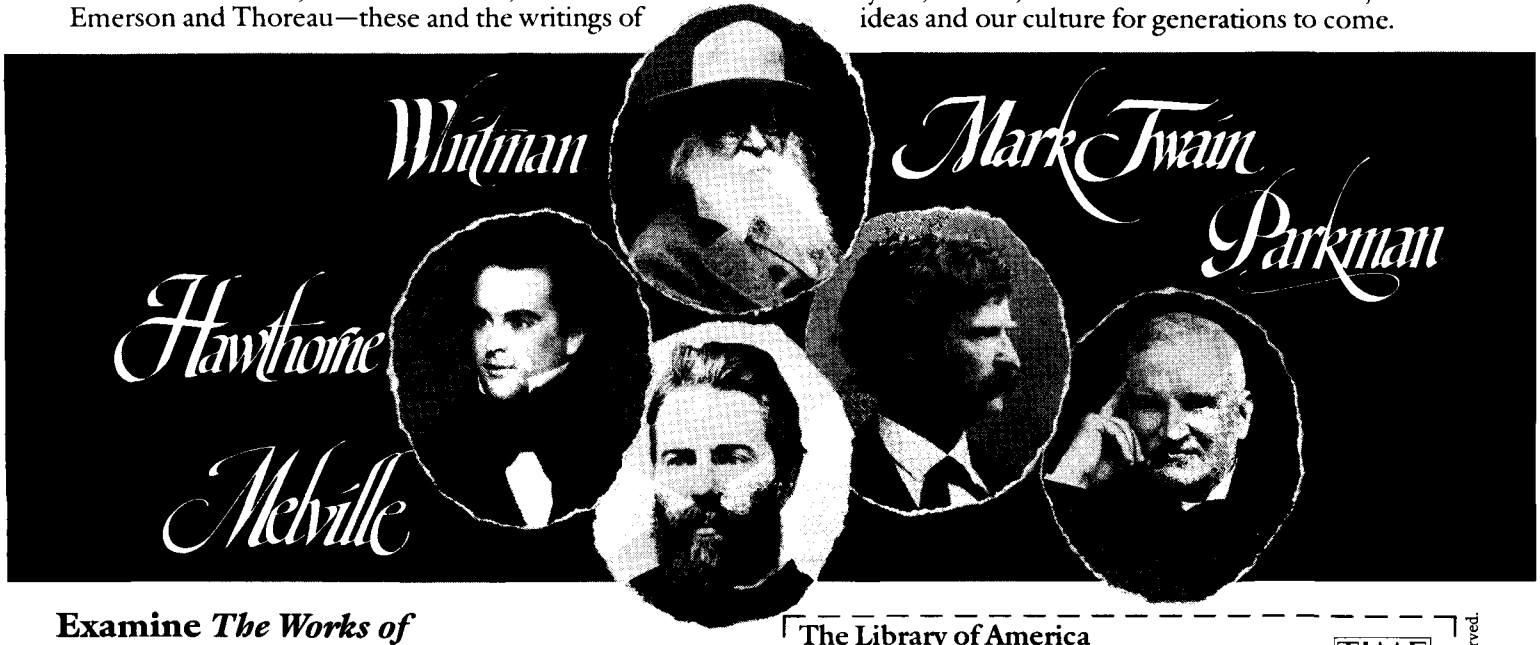

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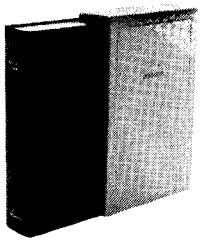

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TRB®

FROM WASHINGTON

Zelig Versus Spam

Walter Mondale and John Glenn spoke last week in front of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. C.D.M. is an organization that arose from the ashes of the 1972 electoral debacle like a phoenix (or perhaps like a cloud of smoke—choose your analogy), pledged to rescue the Democratic Party from the curse of something called "McGovernism." C.D.M. members passionately believe that they represent the historical mainstream of a party long committed to internationalism and a strong defense. It annoys them greatly that crude journalists insist on identifying them as merely a "wing" of the party, and the conservative wing at that. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a man who will outwit any attempt to classify him if you give him enough time, as New York voters seem intent on doing, made a great point on this occasion that C.D.M.'s cofounder was Hubert Humphrey. But C.D.M. is generally thought of as the spirit-made-flesh of its other cofounder, Henry "Scoop" Jackson, the Democrats' leading defense hawk until his death September 1.

Mondale spoke first. He is the Zelig of American politics. Like the "human chameleon" of Woody Allen's movie, he adopts the coloration of whatever people he finds himself among. For the C.D.M. crowd, it was all Scoop and Hubert and Fritz out there in the trenches fighting the Commies.

Mondale went right to the heart of the issue when he told of growing up in Minnesota under the suspicion that, as a "preacher's kid," he might be a "sissy." A sissy! As Mondale knows, this is exactly what a lot of C.D.M. types still suspect. He reassured them that whenever his family moved to a new town, he was careful to beat someone up. Attaboy, Fritz! A strong nation shouldn't resort to such practices, he cautioned. But the message was plain: Walter is nobody's doormat. (Columnist Robert Novak said that in twenty years of listening to Mondale's "preacher's kid" anecdotes, he'd never before heard this cold war variant. Without doubting for a moment that Mondale's story is true, I hope his campaign will supply a list of his victims so Democrats who are still concerned about his toughness can check out the extent of their injuries.)

Watching John Glenn perform brings to mind another current movie, of course. One confusion in *The Right Stuff* is whether the astronauts are meant to be regarded as genuine heroes with the right stuff or as mere passengers on their rides into space—"spam in a can," as the movie's real hero, Chuck Yeager, says. Whatever his role in the space program, John Glenn is pretty clearly just "spam in a can" in the Glenn-for-President effort—a warm body perched atop the powerful machinery of a national political campaign that could function just about as well if he were sound asleep. After all, do you have to be awake to oppose "false hopes and empty promises," to urge that we "use our resources wisely and [. . . can you guess? . . .] well," or to warn somberly of "winds of change in the coming decade"? Can you actually *be* awake and still declare, as if surprised by your own frankness, "I don't mind telling you that I'm proud of my Senate record"?

Glenn is a centrist in the silliest sort of way. He rejects the labels of liberal and conservative, he told us sternly. When making a political decision, his paramount concern is "what is best for the greatest number of people in this country." Someone charitably suggested that Glenn was saying he's a Benthamite. What he actually was saying (with apparent pride) was "I bring no particular values to the hard choices of political life." No doubt someone told Glenn this was a moderate crowd. But C.D.M. types come to their moderation (if that's what it is) by a fairly complicated ideological choice, not just because tepid porridge is neither too hot nor too cold. Mondale at least knows this crowd and knows where their G-spots are.

The candidates were at their most

continued on page 40

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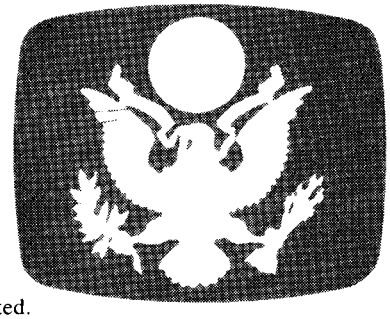

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
DECEMBER 12, 1983

ARAFAT'S LAST BETRAYAL

"Although defeated on the ground by Israel this summer, the P.L.O. has emerged with its leadership and organizational structure basically intact, with Arafat's authority and freedom of action enhanced . . . [and] with his own leadership strengthened." So wrote Loren Jenkins less than a year ago in *The Washington Post*. Mr. Jenkins is no longer in the Middle East, having taken his political acumen and Pulitzer Prize to the Caribbean; and Mr. Arafat ("whose liquid brown eyes," Mr. Jenkins wrote, "impress one the most") remains in the Middle East. But the jig is up, which more honest reporters (Thomas Friedman in *The New York Times* and David Ignatius in *The Wall Street Journal*, for example) had grasped three months before Mr. Jenkins passed on his peppy prognosis for the P.L.O. chairman.

By the time you read this, Mr. Arafat may be dead or on his way to the other Tripoli—in any case, far away from what he calls Palestine. Much has already been made, and more will continue to be made, of the putative distinction between Mr. Arafat's "moderate" approach to the conflict with Israel and the "more extreme" approach of the Fatah rebels and their patrons in Damascus. That distinction was always at such a high level of abstraction that it never had any actual consequences. And that distinction is unlikely to survive the scrutiny of the historians who are already doing their postmortems on the Palestinian movement—a movement which won the attention of the world and then forfeited, perhaps forever, whatever opportunities there were (and there were plenty when the Labor Party ruled in Jerusalem) for a decent and dignified compromise with the Israelis.

What the historians will find is that Mr. Arafat launched his organization and began to mobilize for its military options against Israel long before Israel had captured, in a war initiated by the Arabs, the West Bank and Gaza. That is, the P.L.O. came into being when all of the occupied territories, plus Jewish Jerusalem, the Western Wall, and Mount Scopus, were in fact occupied by and under the sovereignty of Arabs. It will also be recorded that the P.L.O. and Mr. Arafat's Fatah units within it clung to those unlimited irredentist ambitions so tenaciously that they became especially inflexible precisely at moments when some partial goals seemed close at hand. Thus, even after the P.L.O. was rescued from its Beirut bunkers by world opinion in the summer of 1982, and the Reagan plan had committed the United States to restoring the occupied territories to Arab rule, Mr. Arafat refused to sanction the beginnings of negotiations between King Hussein of Jordan and the Israelis. He even denied the one genuine moderate in his entourage, Dr. Issam Sartawi, since murdered, the right to address the big post-Lebanon P.L.O. plenum.

With such behavior he displayed his contempt for those very Palestinian Arabs, in the West Bank and in the camps in Lebanon, who, deluded by his winning ways in international capitals, thought he might win them some of their hopes by compromise, the only way out of their miserable predicament. There is now speculation that Mr. Arafat might at last give King Hussein the go-ahead nod for negotiations. Don't bet on it. But if he does, that nod won't push King Hussein very far. It's far from clear that Jordan really wants the burden of the West Bank; anyway, an

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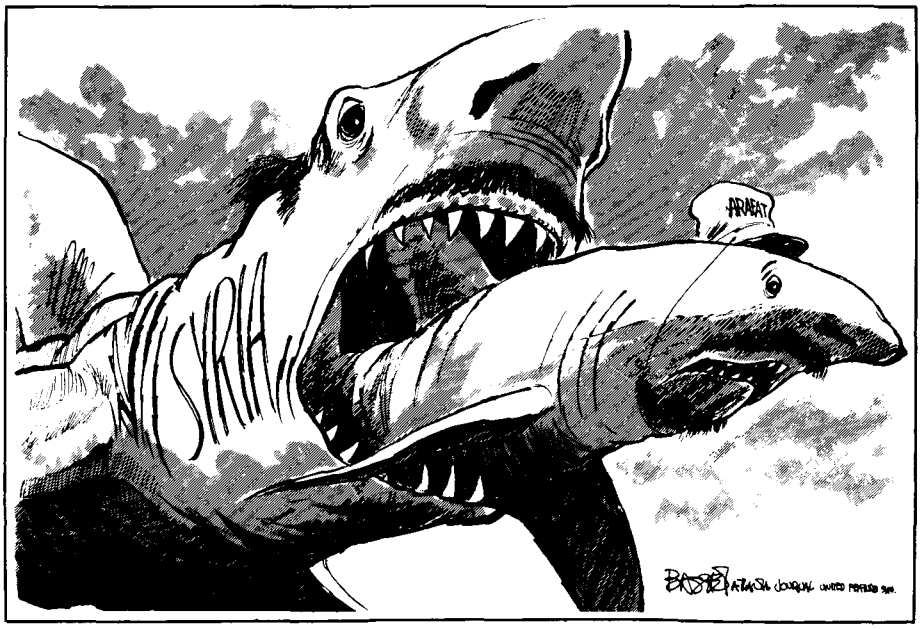
Arafat nod would mean much less now than it would have a year ago September or even last spring. King Hussein is now more afraid than ever of the Syrians. The latter have been killing the king's emissaries here and there around the world, to remind him that Damascus's position on negotiations is exactly what Mr. Arafat's was, and that this position, like Mr. Arafat's, will be bolstered by terrorism. Yet it would not be uncharacteristic of Mr. Arafat to undertake some maneuver to simulate diplomatic activity, even—or especially—now, when he would bring no cards to any table, not even to one with seats only for Arabs. And because fantasy is often confused with reality in the Middle East, many long-suffering Palestinians may yet again be taunted by futile hopes and insincere gestures.

This would not be the cruelest betrayal of the Palestinians. As we write, that consummate act is now taking place in and around Tripoli. Besieged in his last redoubt on Lebanese territory by his own old comrades from Fatah, now backed by Syria, Mr. Arafat reverted to his habitual strategic reflex: the taking of civilian hostages. For years he did that primarily to Israelis, or to Jews, or to people who had the temerity to ride Israeli aircraft or simply to be in the vicinity of an Israeli facility. Although the P.L.O. was seldom finicky about who got killed in its acts of random terror, it preferred Israeli innocents; that was heroic as well as scrupulous. This scruple finally gave out altogether last year when Mr. Arafat's troops waged their last-ditch battle from the refugee camps around Beirut and from elsewhere in the city's western sector. The media, which made much of the fact that Israel shelled and bombed civilian areas, seldom mentioned the fact that it was the P.L.O. and P.L.O. guns which denied Beirut the status of an open city, that is, one protected by international law from attack.

During these past weeks, Palestinian (and Lebanese) civilians have been under ferocious attack—this time by Palestinians, though at first only by anti-Arafat ones. A few observers have commented on the loud silence from Arab and other friends of the Palestinians on this fratricidal slaughter. A few have even mentioned that it was Mr. Arafat—without a chance of victory and playing brutally once again with other people's lives in order to save face, that new raison d'état—who carried the war into the homes of his own bedraggled people in the camps, those monuments of Arab callousness. And now he has carried it into the city of Tripoli itself. Many hundreds have been killed, though this time to the witness of an indifferent world. As in Beirut, Mr. Arafat has once again, *The New York Times* reports, "put most of his rocket launchers and mortars among the people," some of them close to half a dozen medical clinics. And he is not only attracting shells from his enemies but firing them at those enemies, wherever they may be—and, like his own forces, they are among the people. The ugly and insane result is a vast bloodletting of the Palestinians conducted by Palestinians in the name of Palestine. If this is what they do to themselves, imagine what, given half a chance, they would do to the Israelis.



CARTOON BY BASSET

NOTEBOOK

□ WHO'S GOT THE BUTTON? Seven of the Democratic Presidential candidates responded recently to an issues questionnaire circulated by Mayor Ed Koch of New York. Would they use tactical nuclear weapons to halt a Soviet invasion of Western Europe? Koch wanted to know. According to elementary deterrence theory and three decades of NATO defense policy, the only responsible public answer to Mr. Koch's question (whatever one would actually *do* in such a situation) is an unequivocal "Yes." Six of candidates, including all those usually judged "serious," hemmed and hawed. Only the longest of the long shots could bring himself to speak honestly about it. "Yes, I would use tactical weapons if they were the only way to prevent a Soviet takeover," said George McGovern.

□ FIFTY YEARS AGO IN THE NEW REPUBLIC: "Judge Callahan, who supplanted Judge Horton in presiding at the Scottsboro trials, has seemed singularly insensitive to the fact that the eyes of the world were upon him. He swept aside evidence tending to support the view that the general feeling in and around Decatur was such as to make a fair trial almost impossible. He refused to permit the introduction of vitally important evidence showing

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that the two young women (one of whom has denied that there was any attack) had spent the preceding night in a hobo jungle with two young white men. He flatly asserted from the bench that no Southern white woman, however degraded, would voluntarily have sex relations with a Negro. His attitude toward the chief defense counsel, Samuel Leibowitz, can only be described as one of half-concealed hostility. His mental bias was strikingly revealed when, in charging the jury, he forgot to instruct them how to bring in any verdict except one of guilt. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the jury should once again have shut its eyes to the evidence and sentenced the defendant to death. It will be no surprise if similar verdicts are found in the case of the other Negroes. Appeals will of course be taken; and it seems reasonable to believe that the miscarriage of justice is again sufficiently obvious to bring the question before the United States Supreme Court. But the real tragedy in the case is still Alabama's." ("The Week," The Editors, December 13, 1933.)

CROSSCURRENTS

IN MOHGRO LAND

THERE HAS BEEN a lot of talk lately about the "moral high ground" (time is short: call it "mohgro"), that strategic territory the United States apparently ceded to Cuba and the Soviet Union in exchange for Grenada. The loss of this piece of real estate has provoked protests from quarters normally indifferent to the territorial exchanges of the cold war. From the gnashing of teeth and pointing of fingers occasioned by the loss of this former American province, one would imagine we'd lost another China.

Who lost mohgro? Ronald Reagan, of course. But how exactly did we acquire it in the first place? Robert Kaiser, of *The Washington Post*, explains. He criticizes the President for "squandering the moral high ground the Soviets had granted him by their bad behavior in Poland, Afghanistan, and the destruction of Flight 007." So mohgro was won because of "bad behavior" on the part of our adversaries. But wasn't there bad behavior in Grenada, too, shortly before the American invasion? Didn't the military junta assassinate the prime minister, much of his cabinet, and a still unknown number of civilians? Exactly. We were in veritable moral orbit then, with all those dead and dying to which we could point with satisfaction and say: "See, that's what happens when you mess with Marxists." Well then, how did we squander our advantage? Answer: By doing something about the thuggery that had granted our side the mohgro in the first place. To be precise, by ending it.

That's the point. When others are bad you can seize the mohgro with a pointed finger and a fine denunciation. On one condition: you do nothing real to help the victims. The denunciation must be impotent. That, after all, is what Afghanistan, Poland, and Flight 007 have in common. Not just bad behavior by the Russians, but bad behavior the victims of which we could variously mourn, applaud, or pray for, but do nothing to save. Raise a finger actually to do something, and you forfeit your "moral" gains. Intervene to help the victim, and you run the risk of breaking a rule: for example, violating a frontier, or the O.A.S. Charter, or the sensibilities of 106 members of the General Assembly or the editorial board of *The New York Times*. Then, presto! you become just like the Russians. "Simply put," the *Times* wrote, "the cost [of the Grenada operation] is loss of the moral high ground: a reverberating demonstration to the world that America has no more respect for laws and borders, for the codes of civilization, than the Soviet Union."

Really? Representative Thomas Downey says that in Grenada "we gave up the moral high ground we occupied after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and shot down the South Korean airliner." Compare Grenada and Afghanistan. Both involved superpower intervention in a neighbor's affairs. The parallel begins and ends there. In Afghanistan the Russians have been killing people for four years (now with chemical weapons) to keep in power a despised tyrant (an old-fashioned word with the virtue of being acceptable to right and left). In Grenada the United States got rid of a bunch of thugs (not even the *Times* disputes that characterization) in a three-day operation. And it's not just means but ends that are different. We know what kind of government Babrak Karmal runs. And not even Tom Downey doubts that the United States aims to return Grenada to parliamentary democracy.

My argument is not that because we are a democracy the ends of any American intervention are inherently justified. There are cases—U.S. intervention in Guatemala in 1954, for example—where intervention is undertaken for (correctly or incorrectly calculated) geopolitical advantage at the expense of democracy. However, there are cases where U.S. action serves both its own geopolitical interests and the interests of democracy. Grenada is such a case. The burden of proof is always on those who advocate intervention. But if an extremely limited operation to restore a country from gangsterism to democracy is not justified, then what proof will the critics ever accept? None, I suspect. If you believe that mohgro simply goes to the aggrieved, then you don't bother with moral calculations. You seek instead more grief. It makes for a curious foreign policy.

And it's not just the foreign policy of the mohgro theorists that is curious. So is their language. "Obviously the United States has strategic interests to defend," writes Tad Szulc in *The New York Times*, "but, just as importantly, it must defend its moral high ground." The metaphor is military. And far from being an embarrassment to those making a case against the use of force, it is an asset. The metaphor is pointed: high ground, after all, is not a place

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to be coveted solely for its pristine air, unobstructed view, and the opportunity it affords to bask serenely in the radiance of one's own goodness. It is a place from which to dominate and control. The implication is that occupying the moral high ground confers advantages; losing it is costly—"far more costly than the loss of a dozen soldiers," calculates *The New York Times*. The critics' point is this: staying out of Grenada would not only have been the more moral thing to do; it would have been shrewder. It would have advanced American interests more, left us further ahead than we are now. What we forfeited by going in was so important that whatever our gains, on balance we lost.

Now, what precisely did we lose? Our moral superiority to the Russians in the eyes of world public opinion. Grenada, explains Walter Mondale, "undermines our ability to effectively criticize what the Soviets have done in their brutal intervention in Afghanistan, in Poland, and elsewhere." Assume that's true. Assume that the invasion of Grenada was, in fact, wrong (something which I—and Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill, Representative Michael Barnes, Senators Biden and Kennedy, among others—deny). And assume further that the three-day Grenada operation was as wrong as the Soviets' four years in Afghanistan and forty in Poland (where one doubts that 91 percent of the people, as in Grenada, would tell a pollster that they support the armed intervention of their superpower neighbor). Assume all that and look at the balance sheet.

On the one hand, Cuba has been expelled from Grenada (and on the very next day, domino-style from Surinam), its Caribbean enterprises effectively foreclosed. On the other hand, we lose the ability to criticize the Soviets about Afghanistan and Poland and Flight 007. Now, there are people who think that criticizing the Soviets in areas where we can do absolutely nothing is what foreign policy is all about. For them, the balance sheet is negative. Presumably they also believe that our previous exchanges of moral for strategic territory were positive: the Soviets re-Stalinized Poland, captured Afghanistan (putting them two hundred miles from the Persian Gulf), and ensured that nobody in his right mind will violate their airspace. In return we got to denounce them at the United Nations (though not at all on Poland); and on the KAL disaster our (vetoed) Security Council resolution mustered the barest majority of nine votes. We also got a sixty-day partial ban on flights to the Soviet Union, except that it was called off after twenty-one. Nice bargain.

I am willing to grant that victimhood may be ennobling, but not that it is profitable. Moral victories are things that saints, not statesmen, should covet, and in any case only for themselves. Statesmen, who are entrusted with the safety and liberty of their people, should be concerned first with the strategic high ground. If, in addition, it affords a view of any nearby moral heights, so much the better.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Battle Hymn of a Republic.

SOJOURN IN SALVADOR

San Salvador

THE TWINGE of apprehension I felt about visiting this legendary land of violence disappeared when the plane touched down at the San Salvador airport. Like other airports in tropical countries, it seemed pretty, cheerful, colorful, a little sleepy, and of a manageable size. The twinge returned, though, when we got into the vans that were bringing us into town. Inch-thick, bulletproof plastic covered the windows; in the front were an armed driver and a guard in a white, open shirt, with an M-16 lying between them.

Our group—fifteen members of Congress, journalists, and civil rights activists, put together by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee—had come for "fact-finding." We headed directly from the airport to the University of San Salvador. The road into town was one of those sparsely traveled, modern divided highways that small countries build to impress visitors. As we passed through lush farmland on the outskirts of San Salvador, we were briefed by a young woman from the U.S. Embassy. Our questions focused on the issue of violence and security in the city; her answers and the bucolic environment eased our concerns.

At the university, the guard opened the van door with pistol at the ready, peering about like a Secret Service agent protecting a major public figure. We walked through several corridors, past a table bearing tea and cookies, and entered a cheerful, open classroom where three university faculty members waited to speak to us.

They described a life of intimidation and violence, a collapsing economy ("not just an economy at war, but an economy of war"), and the place nearby where the U.S. Marine in charge of security had been shot, apparently by the guerrillas, as he waited for his girlfriend. And always the numbing statistics: thirty thousand murders over the last four years, an average of three hundred violent deaths per month in late 1983, down from a monthly average in 1981 of fifteen hundred. Violence in El Salvador, we were told, is far from exclusively political; it is part of the culture, relied on to settle family, social, and economic disputes with a casualness typical of a feudal society. There's an old—and grim—joke that during one of El Salvador's periods of emergency a soldier shot and killed a civilian who was walking home fifteen minutes before the 11 P.M. curfew. "I know where he lived," explained the soldier, "and he would never have gotten home on time."

Yet as we talked of violence, of the murdered and the "disappeared," members of our group would casually help themselves to the tea and cookies. The doors and windows of the classroom were open, and the atmosphere of the university seemed relaxed. As we drove out we passed the track, where students were running or doing

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calisthenics. We were beginning to grow used to that curious Salvadoran combination, the knowledge of violence contrasted with the casual normality of everyday life.

A few days later we were driven out to Meriano Prison, twenty-five minutes from the capital, to meet with some of El Salvador's political prisoners. At the end of a long gravel road we got out of the vans, and as we walked to the collection of low concrete structures that made up the prison, one of the Spanish-speaking members of our group asked the guard posted on top of the wall not to point his mounted machine gun at us.

In a half-open, half-covered yard inside the prison we were immediately surrounded by hundreds of prisoners. They pulled wooden benches into a square; we sat in the center, like boxers in a ring surrounded by a fight crowd. Virtually all the prisoners had been detained under Decree 507, which enables the security forces to imprison people without trial. Because of the intimidation of judges and other court officials, the country has no effective legal system. Decree 507, needless to say, is wide open to abuse.

The session began with an antigovernment speech given by a labor leader who had been jailed for three years without trial. His wife and son had been "disappeared" while he was in jail. We asked the prisoners about their incarceration and about their physical treatment. As they strained forward to hear the questions and answers, the men about us kept closing in, and their own leaders repeatedly asked them to step back. It became impossibly stuffy as their body heat overwhelmed us; but at no time did any of us feel threatened. Rather, we were startled by the spirit of the group and their remarkable solidarity.

The oldest and youngest prisoners stepped forward to tell of the reasons for their imprisonment. The youngest—who made an angry, obscene gesture as he described his arrest—was only 15 years old. Other prisoners described their experiences and how they had been treated. Each prisoner was applauded by his comrades and interrupted occasionally by the cry, "*Viva Coppes.*" *Coppes* is the acronym for the Community of Political Prisoners in El Salvador. The group responded as a single choir, "VIVA COPPES!" We visitors looked at each other incredulously. In what was presumably the heart of the Salvadoran government's machinery of repression, we were in the midst of a raucous, enthusiastic political rally.

The next day our group drove out to visit two farm cooperatives run by Indians. The Indians had formed a national organization to represent their interests and to try to secure some of the land that had been taken over by the government from two thousand absentee landlords and redistributed to some sixty thousand families in the first phase of the national land reform program. The road to the first co-op ended about a half-mile from the Indians' land. We walked the rest of the way, up and down steep hills, and arrived in a small clearing. The members of the co-op were waiting for us, assembled under a leaf-covered roof supported by four poles. We could hear them playing and singing something, and as we approached we recognized the tune. It was "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

The peasants here were poor, very short, and dressed in simple clothes. The women, some of them nursing children, wore shawls over their heads. Several dogs wandered about, ugly and mangy, with large ears, and so thin that their ribs showed. There were small fires for cooking beans and the smoke from these fires filled the air. A basket full of ice and Coca-Cola bottles sat nearby.

The security guard who had been assigned to us by the National Police was observed standing on a hill, and the Indians told him to go away because they feared he might inform on anything that they might say to us. In a simple, direct way they spoke of their fears of physical harm from the landlords or the government. As each person spoke, there was total silence in the clearing where we stood. The heat and humidity were overwhelming. We asked them about their education and their ability to read, and the leader of their group replied, "We have been educated by the pure struggle of life." He stood behind a table covered with a linen cloth and stacked with five or six Bibles in anticipation of a noon church service to be organized by a traveling minister.

AT THE SECOND cooperative we were given food which the Indians had prepared especially for us—cold, raw corn, a hot soup with vegetables and chicken, and tortillas. Their leader, Adrian Esquino Lisco, said to us, "We celebrate our happiness and our sorrows. We remember the 22nd of February, 1983, when the Army came to kill our people." According to the story he and the other Indians told us, the neighboring landowners wanted to put a road through the cooperative's land and the Indians refused—as was their legal right. On the morning of February 22, two hundred soldiers appeared with M-16 rifles and surrounded the cooperative. They rounded up a number of the men, tied their thumbs behind their backs with cords from the hammocks, and marched them away. When the Indian leaders heard of this, they immediately went to the local army chief, who said he had no information about this. The head of the operation, a Captain Figueroa, appeared in the army barracks and said that they had taken no one from the cooperative. Later that day, the Indians found the corpses of eighteen of their men in the bushes, shot dead, their thumbs tied behind their backs. The case remains open to this day.

Political parties are actively organizing for the 1984 presidential elections. This commitment to the electoral process by major political groups reflects the emerging importance of the democratic process in the organization and transfer of power in El Salvador. U.S. political support has been essential to this change. Just as the election in 1982, conducted in the watchful presence of fifteen hundred journalists from all over the world, had resulted in the transfer of the powers of the presidency from José Napoleón Duarte to the current incumbent, Alvaro Magaña, so too will the elections in 1984 result in a new president, since Magaña is not a candidate.

San Salvador's Camino Real Hotel has become a political

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center. The North American networks and wire services, as well as newspapers like *The New York Times*, have their offices on the second floor. The clicking of teletype machines provides background music for a constant stream of political visitors engaged in perhaps the most important business of Salvadoran politics: trying to influence U.S. public opinion via the media.

I spent several hours at the Camino Real talking to José Antonio Morales Ehrlich, the Christian Democrats' vice presidential candidate. A charming, intelligent man in his 40s, he made the case for his party's ability to open up the political process and establish popular support for the government, thereby eliminating the basis of the guerrilla movement. This would be achieved, he argued, by continuing the land reform and economic development programs supported by the United States, and, most critically, by curbing the right-wing terrorist organizations and their violence. Duarte had lost much political credibility during his tenure as president for his inability to control right-wing violence; Ehrlich tried to make the case that his party, if victorious in the 1984 elections, could succeed where it had failed before.

Ehrlich, though, had not been able to persuade his own sons that his was the best route to physical security and economic and political democracy for El Salvador. Both sons, now aged 23 and 24, joined the guerrillas as teenagers, after studying under "Jesuit priests who took a belligerent political stance" and because of political "frustration." "They keep in touch regularly by calling collect," the father told us; their different political views "had not collapsed their family bond."

IN THE 1982 election over 80 percent of the electorate voted. Everybody we asked, even guerrilla leaders, acknowledged that this election was substantially free and fair. The extent of the turnout stunned all observers; at least two-thirds of the people voted against being "liberated" by the revolutionary left. For many Salvadorans—and for the United States, which actively supported the process—the election seemed to be a rare opportunity to call for an alternative to the repressive right and the radical left.

Others remain skeptical. Monsignor Ricardo Uriosted of the Catholic Church of El Salvador told us, "Elections are but one note in the song of democracy. You Americans keep playing that note and expect us to hear a song." However, one election and the prospect of more have, in fact, opened up the political process to democratic forces, and enhanced the possibility of a peaceful transfer of power. This is a marked improvement in a country where the military has run the country unopposed for fifty years.

After several days, we were able to arrange, along with a group of U.S. Senate aides, an interview with the chief of staff of the army and the chiefs of the Treasury Police, the Hacienda Police, and the National Guard. To indicate their equality amongst themselves, there are no generals, only "colonels."

They entered the briefing room and faced us across a horseshoe-shaped table with name plates in front of each. The dominant figure was the army's Colonel Reyes Miña. A short, stocky man, he spoke in the clipped, flat tones of a man who commands, not listens. Though the questions were persistently provocative, he never evinced any emotion.

"What of the army massacre of eighteen Indians at *Los Hojas Sansonate*?" The colonel's response: "This is being investigated." "What of army atrocities and terror?" Response: "We distributed forms to army personnel on how to conduct themselves." "What about army death squads?" Response: "The International Red Cross investigated this matter." "Where is their report?" Response: "It is confidential." "Why don't you release it?" Response: "The Red Cross won't allow us to do that." "What about the soldiers who murdered the nuns?" His response: "They are being detained." "Why don't you try them?" Response: "It is up to civilian authorities." "What about political killings by your officers and men?" Response: "We arrest them and turn them over to the civilian authorities, but this is very rare." "Why don't you have a system of court martial within the army to enforce your rules?" His response: "The law of this country puts the enforcement of all civilian matters in the hands of the government."

THE CHIEFS GAVE one example of their humane conduct: the fact that there were three prisoners recovering in hospitals. "Are there any more prisoners?" they were asked. "Only three." This after three years of guerrilla warfare. Talking later with a senior U.S. military adviser, I described the very negative reaction of our group to the meetings with the military and security leaders of El Salvador. "There is a kind of feudalism at work here," the U.S. officer replied, "a throwback to a macho culture of violence that is so pervasive, so accepted by the society, that it is beyond the comprehension of Americans. These are truly a people lost in the world. They come from a culture so alien that it is difficult even for those Americans who have volunteered to help El Salvador to sustain any moral or personal enthusiasm for them. When you scratch them deeply enough you reach this atavistic mind set."

I asked him whether the military leaders were so repressive in their ways that the United States could not work with them. He said, "What is important is that we have some control and influence on the conduct of the military. Furthermore, the United States will have trained nine hundred officers and noncommissioned officers for the Salvadoran army by the end of 1983, almost 50 percent of their total. This will provide a better officer pool to work with over time. If we can control the behavior of the senior people for a while, we have a chance to influence the evolution of the Salvadoran army into a more civilized way of running the country. It's just like the South in the United States." The officer—who happened to be black—paused for emphasis. "We have to control their conduct even if we can't effect their attitudes until a new generation emerges."

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Reflecting on what we had seen and heard as we headed for the airport and the plane that would take us away, I remembered our visit to the simple office of the Indian peasant leader, Adrian Esquino. He had taken us inside because he wanted to show us a prized possession: a picture of himself and Senator Edward Kennedy, taken this year in Washington. I remembered the inscription: "Your call for justice will be heard." And I wondered.

MORTIMER B. ZUCKERMAN

Mortimer B. Zuckerman is chairman of *The Atlantic*.

What to do for an encore?

GRENADA II

MR. RUSSELL BAKER of *The New York Times* searched around the other day for another island which President Reagan could invade with éclat. With his characteristic inspiration, he found just such an island: Nantucket. But he did not realize that an actual casus belli exists that would justify Mr. Reagan going to war with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Late one evening a few weeks ago I picked up a rumor that Massachusetts had planted its flag on a sandbar between Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, claiming territorial rights to it against those of the United States of America. The next morning I was surprised to find that none of my colleagues on this magazine, nor any other of my usually well-informed professional acquaintances, had heard the story. I scoured the pages of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* to find a report of Massachusetts's bold pre-emptive strike, but in vain. I called the Washington bureau and then the head office of *The Boston Globe*. Although they could tell me vaguely of a dispute between Massachusetts and the federal authorities, they seemed to have heard nothing of the planting of the Commonwealth's flag on a sandbar.

At last I telephoned the statehouse in Boston, and put my question to a woman in the governor's press office: "Is it true that Massachusetts has planted its flag on a sandbar between Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard?"

She replied in a voice of ineffable disdain, "I believe the Commonwealth *did* acquire a new island." (No mere sandbar, mind you, but an island.) She put me through to a man who seemed able to speak with authority for the Commonwealth. I asked him when the maneuver had taken place. "Two or three days ago; I could find out. But I'm not quite sure, because they went out one morning but could not find the island because of the fog." What forces had the Commonwealth used? "The flag was planted by some retired harbormaster, accompanied by a representative of the attorney general's office of the Commonwealth." (You soon learn to speak, not of Massachusetts, but of "the Commonwealth.") As for the question about whether the site is a sandbar or a full-fledged island, the spokesman could do no more than firmly declare that part of whatever it is is visible even at high tide. So the flag, at least, may fly high and dry.

"This is not our only dispute with the federal government," the spokesman of the Commonwealth went on. "There is a pirate ship down at the bottom of those waters which is believed to contain millions in gold. The United States is already claiming that the gold belongs to it, and we think that it rightfully belongs to the Commonwealth." Not just one casus belli, but two; in fact, three. "There was a choice not long ago which the United States government had to make—whether to station the Surface Action Group of the U.S. Navy at Boston or New York. They decided to station it at New York. But when we read about President Reagan sending all those ships down to Nicaragua, we did not feel so badly, for we felt that the Surface Action Group was as lost to New York as to us."

But the most immediate reason for the Commonwealth's action is also the most longstanding. The cold Labrador Current and the warm Gulf Stream meet off the coast around Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard; and with them come the fish that are native to both waters. These are some of the finest fishing grounds in the world. The United States government wishes to drill for oil in those very waters. To the Commonwealth this would be the height of irresponsibility, as its lawyers have contended for many years in the courts. Recently the feds made some new and menacing legal moves—the details are unimportant, except to lawyers—which convinced Massachusetts it had to act, and the flag was planted.

HOW is the United States to respond to the combative Commonwealth? The President's duty seems indisputable and his political opportunity irresistible. The warm glow of satisfaction created by the triumph in the Caribbean may not last. As election day approaches, there may be a need for something more. The sandbar could be the next Grenada, the next "October surprise"—perhaps contributing to an election victory comparable to Mrs. Thatcher's in the wake of the Falklands.

The invasion of Massachusetts could be presented to the public as a "rescue mission" to save the Union. The mantle of Lincoln—and was he not a Republican?—will fall naturally on Mr. Reagan: the Great Emancipator will replace the Great Communicator. But of course there will be another motive as Mr. Reagan masses his Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. The Commonwealth has a long record of supporting liberal—even radical—regimes and insurrections, both within its own territory and within the United States. It has consistently destabilized other friendly regimes in New England.

During the Revolutionary War—it is doubtful whether there would have been a Revolution without Massachu-

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setts—the British regarded Samuel Adams in the same light as Mr. Reagan regards Communistic Marxist agitators. What is more, arms to support the Revolution came from a foreign superpower—France, a totalitarian monarchy that sought cynically to use the idealistic Americans and "progressive" Frenchmen like Lafayette as pawns in a geopolitical master plan. The main American agent in Paris procuring French arms was, of course, a Massachusetts man. And French arms, along with weapons manufactured by Paul Revere and other Massachusetts gunsmiths, were transshipped to Vermont, New Hampshire, and even New York.

Two hundred years later, Massachusetts was the one state in the Union to give a majority to George McGovern. If its electoral vote went to Mr. Reagan in 1980, that was only because of "the Anderson effect," and little else in the political behavior of the place suggests that it is reliable. It keeps returning Edward Kennedy to the United States Senate, which can only suggest some element (even if undocumented) of Cuban and Soviet infiltration.

How long ago was it that Senator Barry Goldwater said that he would like to saw off the East Coast of the United States? Well, if he was the prophet, Reagan can now be the messiah. The sandbar can probably be captured without the use of nuclear weapons, and that would just be a start. Is there one good American beyond the Alleghenies who would not like to be rid of the Commonwealth (even the word sounds suspect) of Massachusetts? As Senator Goldwater said in his acceptance speech: "Let us make America clean again."

For there is also Harvard. A single neutron bomb would mop up that nest of undesirables for good. Every ex-Trotskyite from Columbia, C.U.N.Y., and the Hoover Institution will support any military measures to destroy Harvard College, though provisions would have to be made to helicopter out selected students from the Harvard Business School and the Harvard Law School, lest American industry be left leaderless in the difficult years ahead.

And President Reagan need not fear a lack of support from the intellectuals. Norman Podhoretz will firm up the backbones of *Commentary* readers with a cover essay entitled: "Defeating Pusillanimous Anti-Americanism: The Case Of The Massachusetts 'Invasion' And Its Critics." George Will, writing from Wrigley Field, will demand the destruction of Fenway Park. Irving Kristol will point out loftily that *The Federalist*—which to conservatives is the true ideological statement of the American Revolution, and not the radical pamphlets that were circulated from Massachusetts—was written by one Virginian, two New Yorkers, and not one Massachusetts man. The American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation, which have the curious habit of describing their propagandists as fellows and scholars, will be moved to Cambridge, or Weinberger City as it will be renamed, and given Harvard's endowments.

What more profitable issue can President Reagan find on which to appeal to the country next year? The polls show that with the invasion of Grenada he leaped ahead of both Walter Mondale and John Glenn in popularity. The same polls also show that the American people are still hesitant about supporting a war in El Salvador or Nicaragua, and are even rather unenthusiastic about the American presence in Lebanon. But having seen one tiny island overrun, why not a rebellious sandbar?

All the arguments will be on the President's side. It is even likely, as he can point out, that despite the moaning and groaning of the media scare artists, a surprisingly large percentage of the people of Massachusetts will survive a limited nuclear war. "Well," I can hear him saying, head atilt, "no one cares more than I do about the problems of postwar reconstruction in the Bay State—and anyway, whatever differences we may have between 9 and 5, when happy hour rolls around Tip O'Neill and I are the best of friends." With that the President will demonstrate his essential humanity, and persuade *The Washington Post* that its original outrage at his action had been misplaced.

There are some of us who will support Massachusetts, if only because we admire Abigail Adams. Others will waver: after a painfully divided editorial conference, THE NEW REPUBLIC will stand firmly by Vermont. But the ordinary people of the greatest nation on earth will be with their President all the way. On November 6, 1984, when the commanding general of the Marines turns over control of occupied Massachusetts to a provisional civilian government headed by Judge William Clark, America will know that it is strong again.

HENRY FAIRLIE

How Venezuela went bust.

THE NEGATIVE MIRACLE

Caracas

A mystery hangs over the narrow valley into which Caracas is squeezed. *Donde estan los reales*? Where are the bucks? "Ah," said an official of Venezuela's Ministry of Mines, as we made our way through the daily traffic jam that stretches from one side of the city to the other, "that is the $64,000 question. Everyone asks that question. Everyone wants to know what happened to the money."

The money in question is Venezuela's enormous oil revenues from the last decade; it has become a central issue of the long political campaign which concludes with a presidential election on December 4. The two leading candidates are Jaime Lusincki of Acción Democratica and the Christian Democrats' Rafael Caldera, who was president from 1969 to 1974. Both are campaigning against the immobilized administration of the incumbent, Luis Herrera Campins. This task is not easy for Caldera, since he and President Herrera are of the same party.

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Energy Uncertainties

What ever happened to the energy crisis?

Only a few years ago there seemed to be steadily worsening shortages of oil. Now the talk is of glut.

Are our national energy problems over? Or are we merely enjoying what is at best a temporary reprieve from energy upheavals?

The world is awash in oil, but it's wishful thinking to believe either that the glut is permanent or that our energy problems have faded away with the gas lines and odd-even gas-buying days.

The difference between surplus and scarcity is tenuous. It took a change of only two million barrels of oil a day to tip world oil from a seller's to a buyer's market in 1981. Supplies are stable now, but this stability is fragile. It could easily be upset by a swing in oil production or usage. Energy demand may grow as economic recovery gathers momentum. And political uncertainties cloud our energy future.

The International Energy Agency warns that the world may experience oil shortages later this decade. Domestically, the U.S. is producing 10% less oil today than we did in 1970, even though domestic prices have increased from $3 to about $30 a barrel. Since the beginning of 1982, the number of drilling rigs in operation in the U.S. has dropped by almost half.

Alternative energy sources have not been widely embraced. For instance, nuclear energy development is blocked by environmental concerns and ensnared in red tape. Coal-conversion projects have stalled throughout the industrial world. Solar energy still is in its infancy. The synfuels program seems to be at a standstill.

It's an illusion that energy prices are going down. Oil prices have softened, but only from their historic high of $34 a barrel. The prices today are still more than 15 times greater than they were at the time of the 1973 oil embargo. And they're holding in this range even though there's been a 40% decline in oil production since 1979. Whatever happens to oil, the prices of other energy sources, such as natural gas and electricity, are going up sharply.

In the area of energy conservation, however, there's good news. Strong gains have been made in energy savings. Total energy used in the U.S. last year was the same as in 1973, even though the gross national product has grown by about 17% in the past nine years.

Energy conservation should remain at the top of the nation's agenda. We should not allow ourselves to become complacent about energy. Nor should we forget the lessons of the past decade. To return to wasteful habits, or slacken our efforts in conservation, would only weaken America's economic future.

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The missing money is also at the heart of another matter. For Venezuela has been catapulted to a major role—along with Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, the International Monetary Fund, and hundreds of unhappy banks—in the unfolding world drama of debt and austerity.

Yet only a couple of years ago Venezuela looked very rich to everybody, including, most notably, bankers and Venezuelans. Between the end of 1978 and 1981, the price of oil went from $13 to $34 a barrel. Venezuela's earnings from the export of its oil swelled from $7 billion to $20 billion. Yet this brought no visible improvement in Venezuelan life. Indeed, for almost half a decade, Venezuela has been in a recession, with virtually no economic growth. Last year it had negative economic growth, and the Economic Commission for Latin America estimates that the country's national income, on a per capita basis, actually fell 12 percent between 1979 and 1982.

Compared to the rest of Latin America, Venezuela is well off. Despite the recent decline, it still has the highest per capita income in Latin America. It is also a real functioning democracy, in which power changes hands constitutionally. But the recent fall in world oil prices and in oil exports—plus Venezuela's inability to absorb petrodollars, and the apparent waste of much of the earnings of the last few years—have created a domestic economic and political situation that is called, simply, "the crisis." Pessimism and disappointment are widespread. "For thirty years this country grew at a fabulous pace, an average of 7 percent a year," observes economist Gustavo Escobar. "We used to speak of the Venezuelan miracle, but now it's not the miracle we expected. We have a negative miracle." There are fears about whether democracy can survive without economic advance. As one Venezuelan congressman admitted, "Zero growth puts a lot of strain on our system."

What did happen to the money?

IN THE WAKE of the 1973 oil price increase, the Acción Democratica government of Carlos Andres Pérez poured money into development projects and a proliferating number of inefficient state-owned companies. "We went berserk with the number of projects—steel mills, aluminum plants, railroads, hydroelectric projects," said one industrialist. "We didn't have the personnel, the technical people, the management." Still, in the 1970s the economy was growing rapidly. But inflation began to build too, rising to 20 percent by 1980.

In 1979 the Christian Democratic Party, known as Copei, won power, charging that A.D. had "mortgaged the country" with its spending programs. Herrera himself compaigned on the slogan of "What happened to the bucks?" His administration took the conquest of inflation as its mandate. It set out to "freeze the economy." That meant high interest rates and tight money. To encourage efficiency, it dismantled some price controls and reduced trade barriers. However, like its predecessor, it expanded employment in the public sector, which rose from about three hundred thousand in the early 1970s to 1.3 million today. Even before the bottom dropped out of the market for OPEC oil, economic growth had come to an end.

As a result of the post-1973 policies, Venezuela became a big league debtor. Between 1972 and 1982, its foreign debt—both public and private—rose from $2 billion to an estimated $40 billion. As with other third world borrowers, additional debts, primarily by state-owned enterprises, keep getting discovered. Only a year ago, it was thought that the public part of the debt was around $18 billion. The current figure is more than $25 billion.

The debt problem has been exacerbated by the flow of money out of the country. The economic growth of the 1970s and the subsequent dismantling of trade barriers led to a continuing increase in imports. The overvaluation of the bolivar, the local currency, made it difficult for Venezuela to increase exports. The "freezing" of the economy made domestic investment both difficult and unattractive—further encouraging firms and individuals to recycle those petrodollars abroad. Underlying the movement of money has been fear and a desire for security.

DEBT REPAYMENT was manageable so long as the oil revenues were flowing into Venezuela. Over the last decade, about 90 percent of its total foreign currency was earned by oil; and the oil sector and its various ancillary industries account for somewhere between 30 and 40 percent of total gross national product. But by late 1981, demand for oil was falling further and faster than had been anticipated. Venezuela's oil revenues dropped dramatically—from more than $20 billion in 1981 to an estimated $13 billion in 1983. Because overseas oil earnings provide 70 percent of the government's income, this drop in earnings created what is called "the fiscal hole" in the national budget. The inevitable result has been continual and bitter political wrangling among the various parties over how to cut the budget—and who takes the responsibility.

The response of the Herrera government to the "crisis" has been fitful and contradictory. A little over a year ago, the central bank took over what had been the independently managed foreign reserves—$9 billion—of the national oil company Petroleos de Venezuela. The aim was to bolster the government's ability to meet the foreign debt problem. Last February, as the economic situation continued to deteriorate, the government devalued the bolivar and established currency controls to try to stop the outflow of money. This made it prohibitively expensive for private companies to repay their foreign debts. Then, at the end of March, the government declared a moratorium on the repayment of principal on the international debt. Since then the government has been engaged in a long, tortured dance with the I.M.F. and foreign banks over what to do about the debt.

What makes Venezuela's predicament more complex is that a high proportion of its debt is short-term, due in the next few years. Venezuela wants to postpone repayment. But the four hundred fifty or so banks involved are holding back until the I.M.F. approves Venezuela's plans to refinance its debt. The I.M.F. is insisting upon painful

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domestic austerity policies, as it has with Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil.

Despite the shuttling between Caracas and New York, there has been no evident progress. Copei politicians have hardly wanted to submit to an unpopular austerity program in the midst of an election campaign.

An Accíon Democratica victory is widely expected—mainly because the Herrera government has become so unpopular. Its inability to respond to the crisis has alienated many of Copei's constituencies.

"There's not much difference between the two parties ideologically," said a businessman who supported Copei in 1978. "But A.D. is more realistic—or at least closer to realism." Lusincki has criticized the I.M.F. directly, and suggested that Venezuela could do without it. But this may simply mean that Lusincki, if elected, would have more flexibility than his main rival in reaching an agreement with the I.M.F. Once the election is over, postponement will no longer work, and the new president—whether Lusincki or Caldera—will have to face up to the situation in a way that the Herrera administration has not. The new administration will have to balance domestic political pressures and the need to maintain an underlying national consensus, on the one side, and the exigencies of international debt, on the other. The main issues in 1984—and in negotiation with the I.M.F.—will be the mushrooming public employment, government spending, and the massive debt of the state-owned enterprises. "The really key issue," said Venezuelan businessman Pedro Pick, "is the return of confidence that would attract capital back into the country. And that will not be done in a year."

The immediate aftermath of the election could provide the best opportunity to work out a compromise. And the compromises will have to come from both sides: Venezuela's ratio of revenue to debt gives it a strong balance sheet but the I.M.F. has to be mindful that economic austerity does not take place in a political and social vacuum.

The politics of austerity will certainly test Venezuela's quarter-century-old democratic system in a way that it has never been tested before. Despite decades of talk about "sowing the oil" and diversification of the economy, Venezuela discovered in 1983 that oil still reigns over its economic and political fortunes—and will continue to do so. "On a twenty-year horizon, we can't see even a partial substitute for oil as a revenue source for our country," observed Alberto Quiros, the president of Maraven, one of the four operating companies of Petroleos de Venezuela. "We've been trying for the last forty years to do everything we can think of to reduce that dependence—without much success. Whether we like it or not, we are highly dependent. Even brutally dependent."

DANIEL YERGIN

Daniel Yergin most recently edited *Energy Demand: Decline or Rebound?* He is president of Cambridge Energy Research Associates.

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The lottery of capital punishment is rigged by race.

DECISIONS OF DEATH

BY DAVID BRUCK

THERE ARE 1,150 men and 13 women awaiting execution in the United States. It's not easy to imagine how many people 1,163 is. If death row were really a row, it would stretch for 1.3 miles, cell after six-foot-wide cell. In each cell, one person, sitting, pacing, watching TV, sleeping, writing letters. Locked in their cells nearly twenty-four hours a day, the condemned communicate with each other by shouts, notes, and hand-held mirrors, all with a casual dexterity that handicapped people acquire over time. Occasionally there is a break in the din of shouted conversations—a silent cell, its inhabitant withdrawn into a cocoon of madness. That's what death row would look like. That's what, divided up among the prisons of thirty-four states, it does look like.

This concentration of condemned people is unique among the democratic countries of the world. It is also nearly double the number of prisoners who were on death row in 1972 when the Supreme Court, in *Furman* v. *Georgia*, averted a massive surge of executions by striking down all the nation's capital punishment laws.

But in another sense, death row is very small. If every one of these 1,163 inmates were to be taken out of his or her cell tomorrow and gassed, electrocuted, hanged, shot, or injected, the total of convicted murderers imprisoned in this country would decline from some 33,526 (at last count) to 32,363—a reduction of a little over 3 percent. Huge as this country's death row population has become, it does not include—and has never included—more than a tiny fraction of those who are convicted of murder.

It falls to the judicial system of each of the thirty-eight states that retain capital punishment to cull the few who are to die from the many who are convicted of murder. This selection begins with the crime itself, as the community and the press react with outrage or with indifference, depending on the nature of the murder and the identity of the victim. With the arrest of a suspect, police and prosecutors must decide what charges to file, whether to seek the death penalty, and whether the defendant should be allowed to plea-bargain for his life. Most of these decisions can later be changed, so that at any point from arrest to trial the defendant's chances of slipping through the death penalty net depend on chance: the inclinations and ambitions of the local prosecutor, the legal and political pressures which impel him to one course of action or another, and the skill or incompetence of the court-appointed defense counsel.

In the courtroom, the defendant may be spared or condemned by the countless vagaries of the trial by jury. There are counties in each state where the juries almost always impose death, and counties where they almost never do. There are hanging judges and lenient judges, and judges who go one way or the other depending on who the victim's family happens to be, or the defendant's family, or who is prosecuting the case, or who is defending it.

Thus at each stage between arrest and sentence, more and more defendants are winnowed out from the ranks of those facing possible execution: in 1979, a year which saw more than eighteen thousand arrests for intentional homicides and nearly four thousand murder convictions throughout the United States, only 159 defendants were added to death row. And even for those few who are condemned to die, there lies ahead a series of appeals which whittle down the number of condemned still further, sparing some and consigning others to death on the basis of appellate courts' judgments of the nuances of a trial judge's instructions to the jury, of whether the court-appointed defense lawyer had made the proper objections at the proper moments during the trial, and so on. By the time the appeals process has run its course, almost every murder defendant who faced the possibility of execution when he was first arrested has by luck, justice, or favor evaded execution, and a mere handful are left to die.

This process of selection is the least understood feature of capital punishment. Because the media focus on the cases where death has been imposed and where the executions seem imminent, the public sees capital punishment not as the maze-like system that it is, but only in terms of this or that individual criminal, about to suffer just retribution for a particular crime. What we don't see in any of this now-familiar drama are hundreds of others whose crimes were as repugnant, but who are jailed for life or less instead of condemned to death. So the issues appear simple. The prisoner's guilt is certain. His crime is horrendous. Little knots of "supporters" light candles and hold vigils. His lawyers rush from court to court raising arcane new appeals.

The condemned man himself remembers the many

David Bruck practices law in Columbia, South Carolina.

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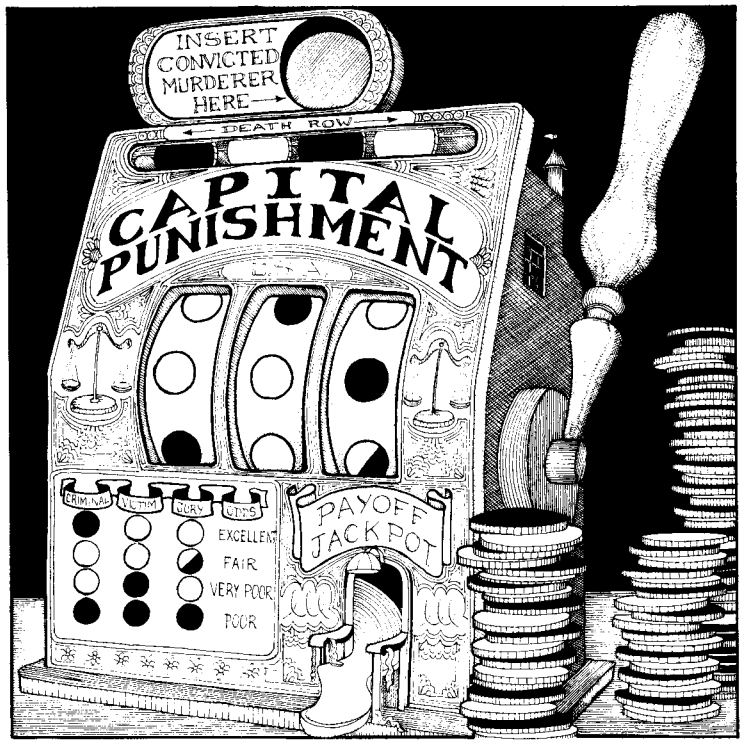
points of his procession through the judicial system at which he might have been spared, but was not. He knows, too, from his years of waiting in prison, that most of those who committed crimes like his have evaded the execution that awaits him. So do the prosecutors who have pursued him throught the court system, and the judges who have upheld his sentence. And so do the defense lawyers, the ones glimpsed on the TV news in the last hours, exhausted and overwrought for reasons that, given their client's crimes, must be hard for most people to fathom.

I am one of those lawyers, and I know the sense of horror that propels those last-minute appeals. It is closely related to the horror that violent crime awakens in all of us—the random kind of crime, the sniper in the tower or the gunman in the grocery store. The horror derives not from death, which comes to us all, but from death that is inflicted *at random*, for no reason, for being on the wrong subway platform or the wrong side of the street. Up close, that is what capital punishment is like. And that is what makes the state's inexorable, stalking pursuit of this or that particular person's life so chilling.



DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The lawyers who bring those eleventh-hour appeals know from their work how many murderers are spared, how few are sentenced to die, and how chance and race decide which will be which. In South Carolina, where I practice law, murders committed during robberies may be punished by death. According to police reports, there were 286 defendants arrested for such murders from the time that South Carolina's death penalty law went into effect in 1977 until the end of 1981. (About a third of those arrests were of blacks charged with killing whites.) Out of all of those 286 defendants, the prosecution had sought the death penalty and obtained final convictions by the end of 1981 against 37. And of those 37 defendants, death sentences were imposed and affirmed on only 4; the rest received prison sentences. What distinguished those 4 defendants' cases was this: 3 were black, had killed white storeowners, and were tried by all-white juries; the fourth, a white, was represented at his trial by a lawyer who had never read the state's murder statute, had no case file and no office, and had refused to talk to his client for the last two months prior to the trial because he'd been insulted by the client's unsuccessful attempt to fire him.

If these four men are ultimately executed, the newspapers will report and the law will record that they went to their deaths because they committed murder and robbery. But when so many others who committed the same crime were spared, it can truthfully be said only that these four men were *convicted* because they committed murder: they were *executed* because of race, or bad luck, or both.

If one believes, as many do, that murderers deserve whatever punishment they get, then none of this should matter. But if the 1,163 now on death row throughout the United States had actually been selected by means of a lottery from the roughly 33,500 inmates now serving sentences for murder, most Americans, whatever their views on capital punishment as an abstract matter, would surely be appalled. This revulsion would be all the stronger if we limited the pool of those murderers facing execution by restricting it to blacks. Or if we sentenced people to die on the basis of the race of the *victim*, consigning to death only those—whatever their race—who have killed whites, and sparing all those who have killed blacks.

The reason why our sense of justice rebels at such ideas is not hard to identify. Violent crime undermines the sense of order and shared moral values without which no society could exist. We punish people who commit such crimes in order to reaffirm our standards of right and wrong, and our belief that life in society can be orderly and trusting rather than fearful and chaotic. But if the punishment itself is administered chaotically or arbitrarily, it fails in its purpose and becomes, like the crime which triggered it, just another spectacle of the random infliction of suffering—all the more terrifying and demoralizing because this time the random killer is organized society itself, the same society on which we depend for stability and security in our daily lives. No matter how much the individual criminal thus selected for death may "deserve" his punishment, the manner of its imposition robs it of any possible value, and leaves us ashamed instead of reassured.

It was on precisely this basis, just eleven years ago, that the Supreme Court in *Furman* v. *Georgia* struck down every death penalty law in the United States, and set aside the death sentences of more than six hundred death row inmates. *Furman* was decided by a single vote (all four Nixon

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appointees voting to uphold the death penalty laws), and though the five majority justices varied in their rationales, the dominant theme of their opinions was that the Constitution did not permit the execution of a capriciously selected handful out of all those convicted of capital crimes. For Justice Byron White and the rest of the *Furman* majority, years of reading the petitions of the condemned had simply revealed "no meaningful basis for distinguishing the few cases in which [death] is imposed from the many in which it is not." Justice Potter Stewart compared the country's capital sentencing methods to being struck by lightning, adding that "if any basis can be discerned for the selection of these few to be sentenced to die, it is on the constitutionally impermissible basis of race." Justice William O. Douglas summarized the issue by observing that the Constitution would never permit any law which stated

> that anyone making more than $50,000 would be exempt from the death penalty . . . [nor] a law that in terms said that blacks, those that never went beyond the fifth grade in school, those who made less than $3,000 a year, or those who were unpopular or unstable would be the only people executed. *A law which in the overall view reaches that result in practice has no more sanctity than a law which in terms provides the same.* [Emphasis added.]

On the basis of these views, the Supreme Court in *Furman* set aside every death sentence before it, and effectively cleared off death row. Though *Furman* v. *Georgia* did not outlaw the death penalty as such, the Court's action came at a time when America appeared to have turned against capital punishment, and *Furman* seemed to climax a long and inexorable progression toward abolition. After *Furman*, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, who had dissented from the Court's decision, predicted privately that there would never be another execution in the United States.

What happened instead was that the majority of state legislatures passed new death sentencing laws designed to satisfy the Supreme Court. By this year, eleven years after *Furman*, there are roughly as many states with capital punishment laws on the books as there were in 1972.

In theory the capital sentencing statutes under which the 1,163 prisoners now on death row were condemned are very different from the death penalty laws in effect prior to 1972. Under the pre-*Furman* laws, the process of selection was simple: the jury decided whether the accused was guilty of murder, and if so, whether he should live or die. In most states, no separate sentencing hearing was held: jurors were supposed to determine both guilt and punishment at the same time, often without benefit of any information about the background or circumstances of the defendant whose life was in their hands. Jurors were also given no guidelines or standards with which to assess the relative gravity of the case before them, but were free to base their life-or-death decision on whatever attitudes or biases they happened to have carried with them into the jury room. These statutes provided few grounds for appeal and worked fast: as late as the 1950s, many prisoners were executed within a few weeks of their trials, and delays of more than a year or two were rare.

In contrast, the current crop of capital statutes have created complex, multi-tiered sentencing schemes based on lists of specified "aggravating" and "mitigating" factors which the jury is to consider in passing sentence. Sentencing now occurs at a separate hearing after guilt has been determined. The new statutes also provide for automatic appeal to the state supreme courts, usually with a requirement that the court determine whether each death sentence is excessive considering the defendant and the crime.

THE FIRST of these new statutes—from Georgia, Florida, and Texas—came before the Supreme Court for review in 1976. The new laws were different from one another in several respects—only Georgia's provided for case-by-case review of the appropriateness of each death sentence by the state supreme court; Florida's permitted the judge to sentence a defendant to death even where the jury had recommended a life sentence; and the Texas statute determined who was to be executed on the basis of the jury's answer to the semantically perplexing question of whether the evidence established "beyond a reasonable doubt" a "probability" that the defendant would commit acts of violence in the future. What these statutes all had in common, however, was some sort of criteria, however vague, to guide juries and judges in their life-or-death decisions, while permitting capital defendants a chance to present evidence to show why they should be spared. Henceforth—or so went the theory behind these new laws—death sentences could not be imposed randomly or on the basis of the race or social status of the defendant and the victim, but only on the basis of specific facts about the crime, such as whether the murder had been committed during a rape or a robbery, or whether it had been "especially heinous, atrocious and cruel" (in Florida), or "outrageously or wantonly vile, horrible or inhuman" (in Georgia).

After considering these statutes during the spring of 1976, the Supreme Court announced in *Gregg* v. *Georgia* and two other cases that the new laws satisfied its concern, expressed in *Furman*, about the randomness and unfairness of the previous death sentencing systems. Of course, the Court had no actual evidence that these new laws were being applied any more equally or consistently than the ones struck down in *Furman*. But for that matter, the Court had not relied on factual evidence in *Furman*, either. Although social science research over the previous thirty years had consistently found the nation's use of capital punishment to be characterized by arbitrariness and racial discrimination, the decisive opinions of Justices White and Stewart in *Furman* cited none of this statistical evidence, but relied instead on the justices' own conclusions derived from years of experience with the appeals of the condemned. The *Furman* decision left the Court free to declare the problem solved later on. And four years later, in *Gregg* v. *Georgia*, that is what it did.

It may be, of course, that the Court's prediction in *Gregg* of a new era of fairness in capital sentencing was a sham,

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window dressing for what was in reality nothing more than a capitulation to the mounting public clamor for a resumption of executions. But if the justices sincerely believed that new legal guidelines and jury instructions would really solve the problems of arbitrariness and racial discrimination in death penalty cases, they were wrong.

Before John Spenkelink—a white murderer of a white victim—was executed by the state of Florida in May 1979, his lawyers tried to present to the state and federal courts a study which showed that the "new" Florida death penalty laws, much like the ones which they had replaced, were being applied far more frequently against persons who killed whites than against those who killed blacks. The appeals courts responded that the Supreme Court had settled all of these arguments in 1976 when it upheld the new sentencing statutes: the laws were fair because the Supreme Court had said they were fair; mere evidence to the contrary was irrelevant.

After Spenkelink was electrocuted, the evidence continued to mount. In 1980 two Northeastern University criminologists, William Bowers and Glenn Pierce, published a study of homicide sentencing in Georgia, Florida, and Texas, the three states whose new death penalty statutes were the first to be approved by the Supreme Court after *Furman*. Bowers and Pierce tested the Supreme Court's prediction that these new statutes would achieve consistent and even-handed sentencing by comparing the lists of which convicted murderers had been condemned and which spared with the facts of their crimes as reported by the police. What they found was that in cases where white victims had been killed, black defendants in all three states were from four to six times more likely to be sentenced to death than were white defendants. Both whites and blacks, moreover, faced a much greater danger of being executed where the murder victims were white than where the victims were black. A black defendant in Florida was thirty-seven times more likely to be sentenced to death if his victim was white than if his victim was black; in Georgia, black-on-white killings were punished by death thirty-three times more often than were black-on-black killings; and in Texas, the ratio climbed to an astounding 84 to 1. Even when Bowers and Pierce examined only those cases which the police had reported as "felony-circumstance" murders (i.e., cases involving kidnapping or rape, and thus excluding mere domestic and barroom homicides), they found that both the race of the defendant and the race of the victim appeared to produce enormous disparities in death sentences in each state.

A more detailed analysis of charging decisions in several Florida counties even suggested that prosecutors tended to "upgrade" murders of white victims by alleging that they were more legally aggravated than had been apparent to the police who had written up the initial report, while "downgrading" murders of black victims in a corresponding manner, apparently to avoid the expensive and time-consuming process of trying such murders of blacks as capital cases. Their overall findings, Bowers and Pierce concluded,

> are consistent with a single underlying racist tenet: that white lives are worth more than black lives. From this tenet it follows that death as punishment is more appropriate for the killers of whites than for the killers of blacks and more appropriate for black than for white killers.

Such stark evidence of discrimination by race of offender and by race of victim, they wrote, is "a direct challenge to the constitutionality of the post-*Furman* capital statutes . . . [and] may represent a two-edged sword of racism in capital punishment which is beyond statutory control."

This new data was presented to the federal courts by attorneys for a Georgia death row inmate named John Eldon Smith in 1981. The court of appeals replied that the studies were too crude to have any legal significance, since they did not look at all the dozens of circumstances of each case, other than race, that might have accounted for the unequal sentencing patterns that Bowers and Pierce had detected.

THE MATTER might have ended there, since the court's criticism implied that only a gargantuan (and extremely expensive) research project encompassing the most minute details of many hundreds of homicide cases would be worthy of its consideration. But as it happened, such a study was already under way, supported by a foundation grant and directed by University of Iowa law professor David Baldus. Using a staff of law students and relying primarily on official Georgia state records, Baldus gathered and coded more than 230 factual circumstances surrounding each of more than a thousand homicides, including 253 death penalty sentencing proceedings conducted under Georgia's current death penalty law. Baldus's results, presented in an Atlanta federal court hearing late last summer, confirmed that among defendants convicted of murdering whites, blacks are substantially more likely to go to death row than are whites. Although blacks account for some 60 percent of Georgia homicide victims, Baldus found that killers of black victims are punished by death less than one-tenth as often as are killers of white victims. With the scientific precision of an epidemiologist seeking to pinpoint the cause of a new disease, Baldus analyzed and reanalyzed his mountain of data on Georgia homicides, controlling for the hundreds of factual variables in each case, in search of any explanation other than race which might account for the stark inequalities in the operation of Georgia's capital sentencing system. He could find none. And when the state of Georgia's turn came to defend its capital sentencing record at the Atlanta federal court hearing, it soon emerged that the statisticians hired by the state to help it refute Baldus's research had had no better success in *their* search for an alternative explanation. (In a telephone interview after the Atlanta hearing, the attorney general of Georgia, Michael Bowers, assured me that "the bottom line is that Georgia does not discriminate on the basis of race," but referred all specific questions to his assistant, who declined to answer on the grounds that the court proceeding was pending.)

The findings of research efforts like Baldus's document

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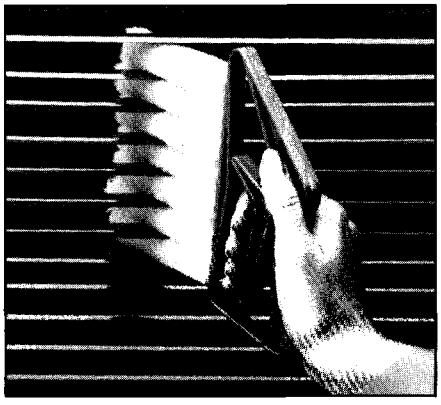

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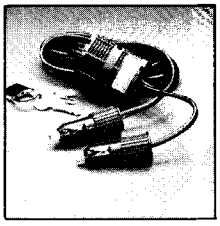

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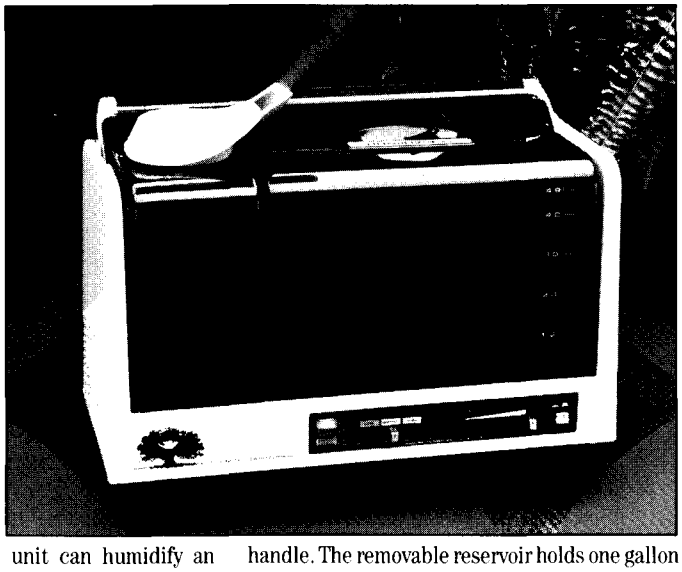

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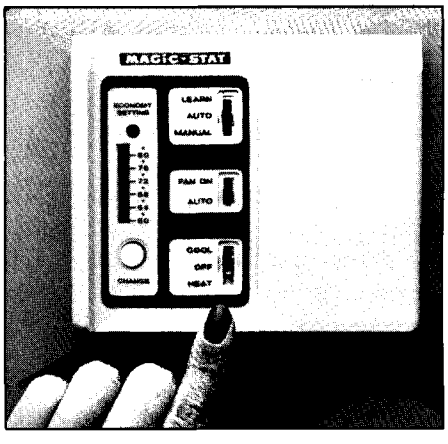

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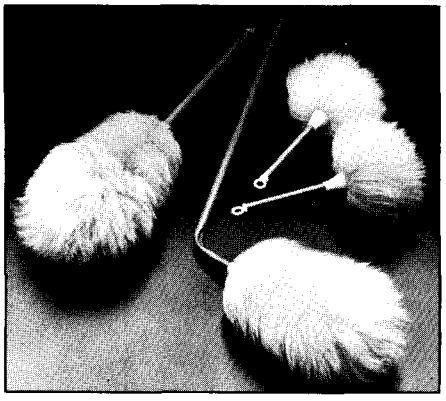

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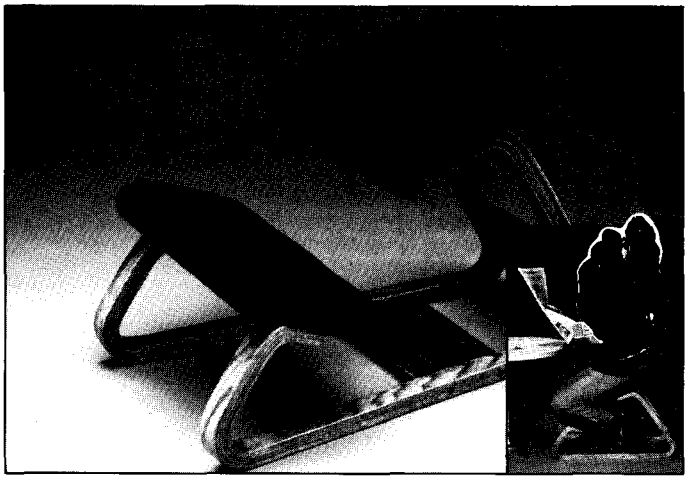

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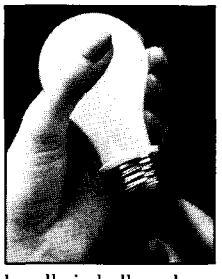

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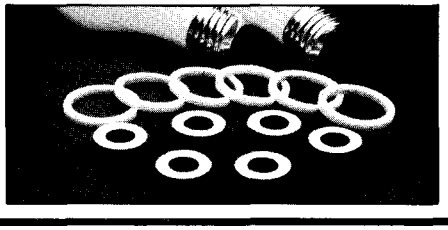

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what anyone who has worked in the death-sentencing system will have sensed all along: the Supreme Court notwithstanding, there is no set of courtroom procedures set out in lawbooks which can change the prosecution practices of local district attorneys. Nor will even the most elaborate jury instructions ever ensure that an all-white jury will weigh a black life as heavily as a white life.

At bottom, the determination of whether or not a particular defendant should die for his crime is simply not a rational decision. Requiring that the jury first determine whether his murder was "outrageously or wantonly vile, horrible, or inhuman," as Georgia juries are invited to do, provides little assurance that death will be imposed fairly and consistently. Indeed, Baldus's research revealed that Georgia juries are more likely to find that a given murder was "outrageously or wantonly vile, horrible, or inhuman" when the victim was white, and likelier still when the murderer is black—hardly a vindication of the Supreme Court's confidence in *Gregg* v. *Georgia* that such guidelines would serve to eliminate racial discrimination in sentencing.

AT PRESENT, 51 percent of the inhabitants of death row across the country are white, as were seven of the eight men executed since the Supreme Court's *Gregg* decision. Five percent of the condemned are Hispanic, and almost all of the remaining 44 percent are black. Since roughly half the people arrested and charged with intentional homicide each year in the United States are white, it would appear at first glance that the proportions of blacks and whites now on Death Row are about those that would be expected from a fair system of capital sentencing. But what studies like Baldus's now reveal is how such seemingly equitable racial distribution can actually be the product of racial discrimination, rather than proof that discrimination has been overcome.

The explanation for this seeming paradox is that the judicial system discriminates on the basis of the race of the *victim* as well as the race of the defendant. Each year, according to the F.B.I.'s crime report, about the same numbers of blacks as whites are arrested for murder throughout the United States, and the totals of black and white murder victims are also roughly equal. But like many other aspects of American life, our murders are segregated: white murderers almost always kill whites, and the large majority of black killers kill blacks. While blacks who kill whites tend to be singled out for harsher treatment—and more death sentences—than other murderers, there are relatively few of them, and so the absolute effect on the numbers of blacks sent to death row is limited. On the other hand, the far more numerous black murderers whose victims were also black are treated relatively leniently in the courts, and are only rarely sent to death row. Because these dual systems of discrimination operate simultaneously, they have the overall effect of keeping the numbers of blacks on death row roughly proportionate to the numbers of blacks convicted of murder—even while individual defendants are being condemned, and others spared, on the basis of race. In short, like the man who, with one foot in ice and the other in boiling water, describes his situation as "comfortable on average," the death sentencing system has created an illusion of fairness.

In theory, law being based on precedent, the Supreme Court might be expected to apply the principles of the *Furman* decision as it did in 1972 and strike down death penalty laws which have produced results as seemingly racist as these. But that's not going to happen. *Furman* was a product of its time: in 1972 public support for the death penalty had been dropping fairly steadily over several decades, and capital punishment appeared to be going the way of the stocks, the whipping post, and White and Colored drinking fountains. The resurgence of support for capital punishment in the country over the last decade has changed that, at least for now. Last summer the Supreme Court upheld every one of the four death sentences it had taken under consideration during its 1982-83 session, and in November the Court heard arguments by California in support of its claim that the states should not be required to compare murder sentences on a statewide basis in order to assure fairness in capital sentencing. The justices may have given an indication of their eventual decision on California's appeal when, just three hours before they heard that case, they lifted a stay of execution in a Louisiana case where a condemned prisoner named Robert Wayne Williams had been attempting to challenge the very limited method of comparison used by the Louisiana courts: as a result, Williams may well be dead by the time the California decision is handed down this spring. When in 1972 the Supreme Court was faced with a choice between fairness and the death penalty, it chose fairness. This time the odds are all with the death penalty.

EVEN WITH the Court's increasingly hard-line stance on capital appeals, there will probably not be any sudden surge of executions in the next year or two. One of the unreckoned costs of the death penalty is the strain it places on the state and federal judicial systems. Any large number of imminent executions would overload those systems to the point of breakdown. A great deal is being said nowadays about the need to speed up capital appeals: Justice Lewis Powell even added his voice to the chorus last spring at the very moment that the Supreme Court had the question of stays of execution under consideration in a pending case. But this attitude tends to moderate the closer one gets to a specific case. No judge wants to discover after it's too late that he permitted someone to be executed on the basis of factual or legal error, and for that reason alone the backlog of death row prisoners can be expected to persist.

Still, the pace of executions is going to pick up to a more or less steady trickle: possibly one a month, possibly two, maybe more. In September Mississippi's William Winter became the first governor since Ronald Reagan to permit an execution by lethal gas: Jimmy Lee Gray died banging his head against a steel pole in the gas chamber while the

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reporters counted his moans (eleven, according to the Associated Press). A month later, J. D. Autry came within minutes of dying by lethal injection in Texas, only to have Supreme Court Justice Byron White reverse his decision of the day before and stay the execution. Now Autry is reprieved until the Supreme Court decides whether California (and by implication Texas) must compare capital sentences to ensure some measure of fairness: if the Court rules that they don't have to, Autry will in all likelihood be executed next year.

So far, the power of the death penalty as a social symbol has shielded from scrutiny the huge demands in money and resources which the death sentencing process makes on the criminal justice system as a whole. Whatever the abstract merits of capital punishment, there is no denying that a successful death penalty prosecution costs a fortune. A 1982 study in New York state concluded that just the trial and first stage of appeal in a death penalty case under that state's proposed death penalty bill would cost the taxpayers of New York over $1.8 million—more than twice as much as imprisoning the defendant for life. And even that estimate does not include the social costs of diverting an already overburdened criminal justice system from its job of handling large numbers of criminal cases to a preoccupation with the relative handful of capital ones. But the question of just how many laid-off police officers one execution is worth won't come up so long as the death penalty remains for most Americans a way of expressing feelings rather than a practical response to the problem of violent crime.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to predict how long the executions will continue. The rise in violent crime in this country has already begun to abate somewhat, probably as a result of demographic changes as the baby boom generation matures beyond its crime-prone teenage and early adult years. But it may well turn out that even a marked reduction in the crime rate won't produce any sharp decrease in public pressure for capital punishment: the shift in public opinion on the death penalty seems to have far deeper roots than that. The death penalty has become a potent social symbol of national resolve, another way of saying that we're not going to be pushed around anymore, that we've got the willpower and self-confidence to stand up to anyone, whether muggers or Cubans or Islamic fanatics, that we're not the flaccid weaklings that "they" have been taking us for. The death penalty can only be understood as one of the so-called "social issues" of the Reagan era: it bears no more relationship to the problem of crime than school prayer bears to the improvement of public education. Over the past half-century, executions were at their peak during the Depression of the 1930s, and almost disappeared during the boom years of the 1950s and early 1960s. The re-emergence of the death penalty in the 1970s coincided with the advent of chronic inflation and recession, and with military defeat abroad and the decline of the civil rights movement at home. Given this historical record, it's a safe bet that whether the crime rates go up or down over the next several years, public support for executions will start to wane only as the country finds more substantial foundations for a renewal of confidence in its future.

In the meantime we will be the only country among all the Western industrial democracies which still executes its own citizens. Canada abolished capital punishment in 1976, as did France in 1981: England declined to bring back hanging just this summer. By contrast, our leading companions in the use of the death penalty as a judicial punishment for crime will be the governments of the Soviet Union, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, and Iran—a rogues' gallery of the most repressive and backward-looking regimes in the world. Just last week Christopher Wren reported in *The New York Times* that the total number of executions in the People's Republic of China may reach five thousand or more this year alone.

It's no accident that democracies tend to abolish the death penalty while autocracies and totalitarian regimes tend to retain it. In his new book, *The Death Penalty: A Debate*, John Conrad credits Tocqueville with the explanation for this, quoting from *Democracy in America*:

> When all the ranks of a community are nearly equal, as all men think and feel in nearly the same manner, each of them may judge in a moment the sensations of all the others; he casts a rapid glance upon himself, and that is enough. There is no wretchedness into which he cannot readily enter, and a secret instinct reveals to him its extent . . . . In democratic ages, men rarely sacrifice themselves for one another, but they display general compassion for the members of the human race. They inflict no useless ills, and they are happy to relieve the griefs of others when they can do so without much hurting themselves; they are not disinterested, but they are humane . . .

Tocqueville went on to explain that his identification of America's democratic political culture as the root of the "singular mildness" of American penal practices was susceptible of an ironic proof: the cruelty with which Americans treated their black slaves. Restraint in punishment, he wrote, extends as far as our sense of social equality, and no further: "the same man who is full of humanity toward his fellow creatures when they are at the same time his equals becomes insensible to their affliction as soon as that equality ceases."

In that passage, written 150 years ago, Tocqueville reveals to us why it is that the death penalty—the practice of slowly bringing a fully conscious human face to face with the prospect of his own extinction and then killing him—should characterize the judicial systems of the least democratic and most repressive nations of the world. And it reveals too why the vestiges of this institution in America should be so inextricably entangled with the question of race. The gradual disappearance of the death penalty throughout most of the democratic world certainly suggests that Tocqueville was right. The day when Americans stop condemning people to death on the basis of race and inequality will be the day when we stop condemning anyone to death at all.

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STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

He That Plays The King

Surprise. I saw Ronald Harwood's play *The Dresser* in London in 1980 and wasn't greatly taken by it. I saw it again on Broadway a year later, hoping that a major cast change would help. It did, but not enough. I went to the film more in duty than hope and was nicely surprised. The script is essentially what it was, a theatrical tour de force about the theater with more tour than force, but now there's Albert Finney. His performance not only enriches the role he has taken over, it improves the balance of the piece. Finney can't rid the work of its fundamental vanity, but he certainly gives it more life along the way, and he does it in a style with a particular reward for anyone interested in acting.

The Dresser
(Columbia)

During the 1950s Harwood spent seven years in the theatrical company of Donald Wolfit, as actor but part of the time as Wolfit's dresser, and out of that experience Harwood has written both a biography of Wolfit and this play. Americans know Wolfit chiefly through his substantial supporting roles in films—such as the girl's tycoon father in *Room at the Top*—but in the British theater he was a star who headed his own touring company, specializing in Shakespeare. In *The Dresser* Harwood drew on his Wolfit experience for character and atmosphere only: it's not strictly factual. For instance, the play/film takes place in wartime Britain, January 1942, in a small town, before, during, and after a performance of *King Lear* by the knighted star, on what turns out to be the last day of his life. He is supposed to have played Lear hundreds of times before. But Wolfit didn't play his first Lear until six months after the date of the play, wasn't knighted until 1957, and died (in a hospital) in 1968. These differences deliberately keep the script from being taken too biographically, but nothing can—or is meant to—keep it from conveying the flavor of the man and his theater.

The basic structural twist is familiar: a shift of the spotlight from the expected protagonist to a peripheral figure. Some previous examples: *Napoleon's Barber* (filmed by John Ford in 1928) and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Harwood has taken the hero-valet combination and, if he doesn't concentrate exclusively on the valet, at least he shows how important the latter is to the hero. Harwood draws both these characters with intimacy and skill, and he sketches in the others adroitly—the star's wife, the quietly adoring spinster stage manager, the differently pathetic members of the company. The dialogue is neatly turned. The trouble is that, despite the script's various virtues, it comes at last to only one more agon about the Agony of It All—the strain of being a star performer on whom the vampiric public feeds. I know of few subjects more tedious.

The protagonist in past films on this theme has moved from actor (*A Star Is Born*) to rock singer (*The Rose*). Those films are always telling us how the public uses up the star cruelly, but whatever the specific subject, the idea is vain. It may be true, even for the best artists, but it's no more true than for many doctors or teachers or social workers or any professionals on whom many others depend greedily, even selfishly. These other professions don't in themselves provide media for self-glorification, as the performer's profession does. To me, the strain is part of the game. A star's sufferings move me just about as much as a President's complaints about overwork after years of campaigning to get the job.

Harwood has had an instinct about the defect in the theme and has tried to buffer it by setting the play in wartime. The star thus can wave the banner of duty: he is fighting the barbarians with his own means, by taking Shakespeare to every corner of the embattled island; and his effort to pull his racked self together and perform can thus be seen—through his own eyes anyway—as something more than "the show must go on." But it's just wartime camouflage for perennial histrionism. The last day of an actor who summons himself to give what may have been his best performance before dying in his dressing room is, at the end, nothing more than that. It has no reach or resonance. It's just an exercise in self-pity before a backstage mirror.

Finney, however, embellishes the texture. In London the star was played by Freddie Jones, who supplied little more than the plummy quality. In New York a much better actor, Paul Rogers, gave the part greater range but, within the structure, he couldn't enlarge the play sufficiently. In the screen adaptation Harwood has given the star more "space," and Finney fills it. Filling it, he alters the balance to the film's benefit.

Besides, Finney does something that neither Jones nor Rogers did: he models his performance of the star on Wolfit himself. As it happens, I saw Wolfit's Lear (New York, 1947), but I don't think experience of Wolfit is a prerequisite to appreciating what Finney does. It's clear that he's not giving us Finney,

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Carmen. The celebrated Spanish dancer, Antonio Gades, re-lives the *Carmen* story with a new dancer, Laura del Sol, as they prepare a dance version of it. Sizzling.

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The Right Stuff. Right enough, anyway. Chuck Yeager and the seven Mercury astronauts in a film of aviation history that, ironically, is almost a history of aviation film.

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as he has done engagingly in many films and as he did less engagingly in *Hamlet* on the London stage: he is creating, with himself, someone distinct from himself. Wolfit subscribed wholesouledly to what he called the "unfashionable theater," with a large-scale style that is too often glibly confused with hamminess. If Finney has a fault in this film, it's that confusion: the segments of his Lear that we see are somewhat broadened. But as the actor himself, the offstage man who goes onstage to speak those lines, Finney does a work of imaginative transformation, with the perception that an actor who spends his time in great roles, often regal ones, sometimes loses sight of where the stage ends and the so-called real world begins.

Tom Courtenay plays Norman, the dresser, as he did in London and New York, and it's a flawlessly turned performance. But that's what it was at the start. Courtenay is as rhythmically tidy, touchingly effeminate, understandably vindictive, and fiercely loyal as he was three years ago. In the film, because of the extension of the "Wolfit" role and Finney's power in it, Courtenay has to bear less of the weight, which helps. This is no reflection on Courtenay. If the soul's turmoil of an actor pulling himself together for a performance is less generally fascinating than theater people think, the travails of his dresser in maneuvering him are even less so. Courtenay is better off here for sharing the burden.

Another pleasant surprise is the direction of Peter Yates. Most of what I've seen of his, from *Bullitt* to *Eyewitness*, has been consecrated to the ideal of flash, of dazzle. Here he simply places his film, which is about acting, at the service of his actors. There's no trickery, no egotistical director's attention-grabbing. He puts his camera at every moment where it will be of most use to the moment and to us. He keeps it close much of the time, not for immense close-ups but because the faces are what the film is about. If a director hasn't developed a style through which a film can move to its truth, and Yates hasn't, his best course is to be invisible, which is what Yates does effectively here.

American music's man of the hour.

THE SPELL OF PHILIP GLASS

BY ANNALYN SWAN

JUST five years ago, Philip Glass was still called "an underground secret in New York's Soho." Despite the brief acclaim that Glass's score for *Einstein on the Beach* had won him in 1976, relatively few people outside the world of avant-garde music knew who he was. His work, based on the repetitive cycles of Eastern music, full of short, endlessly noodling motifs, rising and falling arpeggios, and voices bouncing in long strings of solfège syllables, was performed by the Glass ensemble in out-of-the-way lofts in Soho or even rock clubs. His fans were mostly groupies from the far-out fringes of progressive music—that amorphous area where rock intersected with the experimental music of classically trained musicians like Glass, David Behrman, Robert Ashley, and Steve Reich.

Contrast that "underground" scene with the recent opening of Glass's new opera *The Photographer: Far From The Truth* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The Glass groupies are still there—a second generation of young, intense, counterculture fans. Also present, however, are the glitterati—the directors and famous photographers, the Broadway stars, the trendy art crowd, the punk contingent with pink-and-green streaked hair, and the more soberly dressed crowd that follows the vicissitudes of New York fashion. Glass, 46, has made the leap from far-out to far-in. He is, in a word, chic. All performances of *Satyagraha*, his opera about Mohan-

Annalyn Swan, formerly *Newsweek*'s music critic, is now its senior editor for cultural affairs.

The Yale Review

Autumn 1983/Winter 1984:

The Telling of Lives

The Autumn 1983 and Winter 1984 issues of *The Yale Review* are devoted to the uses of biography and autobiography in fiction, poetry, history, literary criticism, and ethnography.

The list of contributors to "The Telling of Lives" includes Daniel Aaron, Robert Coles, Terrence Des Pres, Erik H. Erikson, Seamus Heaney, John Hersey, R.W.B. Lewis, James Olney, Arnold Rampersad, Jonathan Spence, and C. Vann Woodward.

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das Gandhi that played at BAM two years so, sold out. *The Photographer*, a less successful collaboration of dance, drama, and music, was still enticing enough to draw large crowds and many reviews.

Lyrical, infectious, its incantatory repetitions powered by rock-like amplification, Glass's sea-of-sound music seems everywhere these days. Jerome Robbins choreographed a new ballet last season for the New York City Ballet to racing, pulsing selections from Glass's new *Glassworks* album (CBS) and his upcoming opera *Akhenaten*. His music can be heard on the soundtrack of the movie *Breathless*; on the latest Paul Simon album, for which Glass composed and orchestrated the ending of the song "The Late Great Johnny Ace"; at such gatherings of the clan as the recent New Music America festival in Washington; and as the score for the recently released movie *Koyaanisqatsi*, a wordless film about the rape of the land whose title means, in Hopi, "Life out of Balance." Although much of the art that evolved from the 1960s has gone the way of sit-ins, Glass has instead emerged as a phenomenon of classical music. His affable face, with its hangdog eyes, peers out from Cutty Sark ads; he and his ensemble (with Glass playing electric organ) now perform uptown in Carnegie Hall; *Glassworks* sold an astonishing one hundred thousand albums.

PHILIP GLASS, PHOTO COURTESY OF CBS RECORDS

The more chic and popular Glass becomes, however, the louder the dispute about him grows. Just how good is this so-called minimal music, which lacks traditional melody, harmony, and changes in dynamics and tempo, but which has a dancing, propulsive energy? Its critics—and there are many—attack it as hopelessly trite, overly loud, and excruciatingly boring. Conservative critic Samuel Lipman has dubbed it "a pop music for intellectuals"; *The New York Times* (whose critics are divided on the issue) once described it as "artistically limited enough to be merely trivial, lacking even the sophistication to raise it into the class of the primitive." Its defenders, however, argue that it's anything but limited, if only you know how to listen. "A listener usually reaches a point, quite early on, of rebellion at the needle-stuck-in-the-groove quality, but a minute or two later he realizes that the needle has not stuck: something has happened," Andrew Porter has written in *The New Yorker*. "Once that point is passed, Glass's music—or so I find—becomes easy to listen to for hours on end. . . ." John Rockwell of *The New York Times* has praised its "lulling surface, rhythmic energy, and dreamy counterpoint." If the ultimate value of Glass's music is as yet unclear, however, his position as a pivotal figure in contemporary music is assured. His CBS contract alone is enough to guarantee his standing: he is only the third composer, after Stravinsky and Copland, to have an exclusive contract with the company.

In the eyes of conservative critics, Glass stands for far more than weird, back-and-forth music. He represents a radically different system of values, a system that emerged in the 1960s, builds upon Eastern ideas inimical to traditional Western culture, and is politically liberal. (The anticapitalistic theme of *Koyaanisqatsi* is a case in point.) From that system has come music that, with its repetitive, static surface, its underlying affinity with meditation, drugs, and body over mind, is profoundly different from conventional music. To make matters worse, Glass has deliberately sought the wide audience that "serious" modern composers have disdained. "I want my music to have an immediate, physical appeal," Glass has said. To clubby academics, he is a slap in the face—a renegade who has made good.

Glass's music has its roots in a moment of exhaustion—the period, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when music seemed to have nowhere to go. Romanticism appeared irrevocably dead. Serialism, which had begun in the 1920s as a brave new musical language, a welcome antidote to the excess of the late romantics, had in turn composed itself into a corner. Not only were notes subject to rigid mathematical formulas; so too, in the total serialism that followed Schoenberg and Webern, were rhythm and dynamics. Music had become dense, cerebral, and forbidding. There was not a melody to be heard. The last thing any serious composer considered was whether or not an audience would like his work.

At the same time, many artists, writers, and musicians were looking Eastward, toward the tranquility and mysticism of the Orient. In itself, of course, a fascination with the East is nothing new in Western culture; Europe's preoccupation with China and Japan in the nineteenth century comes immediately to mind, as does the success of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in the early decades of this century. This time, however,

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Western interest went beyond a love for the exotic to the underlying meditative spirit of the culture, the deliberate blanking out of the mind and the elevation of the inner world over the outer one. The Easternization began in San Francisco (of all U.S. cities the one most closely linked to the Orient) and spread throughout California. As early as the late 1940s and early 1950s, John Cage, influenced by Zen Buddhism, had begun to champion spare, meditative music that honored silence as much as notes. With the 1960s came the widespread interest in gurus, meditation, and, with it, the rhythmically intricate ragas of Indian music. In the rock world, the Beatles discovered Ravi Shankar. In the "classical" world, composers like Terry Riley and Steve Reich began to write music based not on the traditional logic of Western music, in which contrasting themes provide the tension and release that propel the music forward, but on Eastern music, in which rhythm becomes the organizing principle and "cells" of notes repeat and grow in additive cycles—one plus two, one plus two plus three. It was meditation music, trance-like, hypnotic, unfolding in a vastly elongated time frame.

GLASS'S OWN evolution Eastward came about by accident. Until he was 30, in fact, he was hardly aware that Eastern music existed. Trained as a classical flutist while growing up in Baltimore, he majored in philosophy and math at the University of Chicago and then earned a master's degree in composition at Juilliard. He wrote acceptably dissonant music in a vaguely American vein, and was a member in good standing of the East Coast musical establishment. Then came the sea change. "It became impossible for me to compose anymore in that style," Glass once recalled, "not for lack of ability but lack of belief." Armed with a Fulbright, and in search of a style, he went to Paris to study with legendary teacher Nadia Boulanger. It was while he was there that Glass got a pick-up job notating Ravi Shankar's music for the film *Chappaqua*. To him, the music—dismissed by Juilliard as primitive—was a revelation. He traveled first to Africa and then India, absorbing the new musical language. What fascinated him was not the microtonal intervals of Eastern music—"I never wanted my music to sound exotic," he later said—but its repetitive structure, which he saw as an alternative to the deadlocked academic music of the past twenty years.

Back in New York, Glass became part of the creative ferment then bubbling in Soho. He discovered that other composers were also working with Eastern ideas. What's more, his structural ideas were reinforced by the work of minimalist artists like Sol LeWitt, Carl André, and Donald Judd. They too made simple, repetitive forms and grid-like structures, and emphasized the underlying "process" of art. Glass's initial music was similarly process-oriented. It stripped away harmonic and chromatic progressions, major and minor keys, modulations between keys—in short, all the building blocks of Western music—until all that was left was rhythmic structure. As Glass wrote in the liner notes to *Music in 12 Parts* (Virgin), he hoped the listener would perceive the music as "a pure medium of sound." It was spare and hypnotic, deliberately monochromatic music that sounds, at least in the light of later Glass music, maddeningly static. It was, as Glass said, "nothing but muscle and bone."

THAT EARLY period can rightfully be called minimal. Today, however, Glass's music is far richer. Having broken music down to its most basic components, he has spent the last decade building it back up in his own exuberantly individual way. The repetitive structure is still there. But by juxtaposing his original additive cells with cyclic patterns in rhythmic counterpoint, he has developed far more dense, free-wheeling music, full of rapid changes and bold juxtapositions. What a listener tends to notice first about Glass's recent music, such as *Koyaanisqatsi*, are not the repetitions but the new-found variety—the rainbow hues, the piquant use of instruments, the increasingly sophisticated use of harmony. All of this is colored by the distinctively bright combination of treble voices, reeds, and electric keyboards that make up Glass's ensemble. (Since saxophone and flute players were easy to come by in Glass's early days, and electric keyboards easily transportable from loft to loft in Soho, he began to write for that combination, adding amplification to balance the sound.) The soothing, childlike harmonies that Glass favors, the glittering sound of electric pianos and organs, the high-voltage volume, the great buildup of resonance, the blend of jazzy saxo-

John Updike in *The New Yorker:*

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A text so self-aware and self-referential suggests the torture machine of Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*, which inscribed, over and over, an unintelligible lesson upon the victim's skin. As well as tireless superscription a constant flanking motion seems in progress; the repeated self-indictments leave the critic little to say. One can scarcely complain of the novel's frenzied solipsism when frenzied solipsism is its chosen and announced topic... *The Anatomy Lesson* revolves around the paradox of incarnation—the astonishing coexistence in one life of infantilism and intelligence, of selfishness and altruism, of sexual appetite and social conscience... Roth's message, driven home in book after book, is what infants men are... Roth has been preeminently a celebrant of a son's world. Who else has given us so many vivid, comical, ironically seen, but above all lovingly preserved mothers and fathers in fiction? Or has so faithfully kept fresh as moral referent the sensations of childhood?...

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phones, classical complexity, and Eastern repetition: all combine, in Glass's best works, to give the listener an immediate shot of adrenalin, a sense of buoyancy and elation.

It is in the area of opera, however, that Glass may be most important. Twentieth-century music has produced few significant operas; there are *Lulu* and *Wozzeck*, the two serial masterpieces, one or two Britten operas, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and a handful more. Part of the problem is that it's all but impossible to compose a "pretty" opera, in the sense of a *Madame Butterfly* or even a *Tristan und Isolde*; the spiky intervallic leaps of serial music make singable melodic lines impossible. Into this void has stepped Glass. What he has created, in conjunction with avant-garde directors and choreographers, is a series of plotless, dreamlike, impressionistic operas in which slow-moving tableaux unfold in perfect accord with the slowly circling music. "My background is in the recent tradition of non-literary theater in America," Glass has said, "in which people draw their inspiration not from a text but from an idea, a drawing, a poem, or an image. It's a tradition almost unknown to the conventional opera-going public." *Einstein on the Beach*, on which Glass collaborated with avant-garde director Robert Wilson, played for two performances at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1976 after some thirty performances in Europe. (To date, all of his major works have been commissioned by European companies or festivals.) That was followed in 1981 by *Satyagraha*, a seven-act work that illuminated pivotal scenes in Mohandas Gandhi's fight for racial equality in South Africa, and by *The Photographer*, a conceptual theater piece based on the life and work of pioneering action photographer Eadweard Muybridge. Still to come, in what amounts to a trilogy based on various iconoclasts' lives, is *Akhenaten*, about the Egyptian king who introduced monotheism, which will have its world premiere early next year in Stuttgart.

Of the three operas composed so far, the most original remains *Einstein*. In large part the credit for that goes to Wilson, who imbued the tableaux (of a train, a trial, and a spaceship) with an eerie, mystical modernism and the sense of the unconscious floating up to the surface of life. Heard on its own, however, the four-and-a-half hour score (released on the Tomato label in 1979) emerges as an impressive rite of passage in Glass's career. At times it is dreamlike and hypnotic; its simple, modal harmonies and counterpoint, a cappella choral passages and frequent organ pedal point, evoke the austere beauty of a Romanesque cathedral. At other times it thunders along with the unstoppable momentum of a freight train. The final spaceship section is a riveting fireworks display—the voices racing at inhuman speed, the electric organs shooting off sprays of rising and descending scales. Throughout one is swept along by the pounding pulse, the bold juxtapositions or, in the quieter passages, by slight variations that tease the ear: has something changed or is it just one's imagination? *Einstein* is fascinating proof that an enormous edifice can be crafted out of the simplest—even banal—effects.

LIKE *Einstein*, *Satyagraha* was dreamlike in effect, its remote and stately feeling heightened by Robert Israel's spare, luminously lit staging and by a gauzy scrim that separated and distanced the audience throughout from the action. Some people have objected that the work seemed, with its rapt intensity, almost a deification of Gandhi—an effect that Glass later regretted. Whatever the flaws of its message (and one does not usually go to the opera to find historic truth), *Satyagraha* was a thing of evanescent beauty, its visionary scenes as ephemeral as clouds, its music more lyrical and floating than in the past. Here, for the first time, was the sweet sound of strings, a score expanded to full orchestral size (minus percussion and brass, and with Glass's trademark electric organ added), and voices that soared dramatically over the accompanying instruments in long, arching solo lines. It was, in its way, the perfect match of music and idea. Like Gandhi's life, and Indian mysticism in general, Glass's repetitive cycles suggested unity within change: all is the same, yet all is different.

HECTOR'S RETURN

By now he's died so often
And been dragged in the dirt so many times
It's easy. He'd have it no other way
And chooses with open eyes
To be deluded by his will to live
And press the attack on the ships,
To forget what he knew at the opening,
That Troy must burn, abandoned by its gods,
His wife and son doomed to be slaves,
His name lost among strangers.

It hurts me to see his mistaken hope,
Though I'm glad that the man I left last year
As ashes cooling on a funeral pyre
Has risen long enough
To fight Achilles once again and fall.
A poem that shows the generations of men
As frail as the generations of leaves,
That makes my solid city flutter in the wind
Like Troy and thin to shadows, as unreal
As my grandmother's village in Lithuania,
Burned down in the War,
Or as the farm she lived on here,
Paved over for a mall years back,
Is the same poem that's watered roses
In Priam's garden so they bloom still.
I turn the page and the trampled leaves
Float up again to the branches
And turn green. And it seems for a moment
That time is too weak a god to worship,
Another illusion I can put my hand through,
Not the last word, as I supposed.

We assumed Grandmother's muttering at the end
About waves and crossings
To be her dream of some longed-for,
Fabled afterworld,
Not guessing she was a girl again
Crossing the sea to us,
Eager to rejoin the long line
On Ellis Island.

CARL DENNIS

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With *The Photographer*, Glass has gone in a trickier direction—away from static, dreamlike drama into more conventional theater. The brainchild of Rob Malasch, an experimental director in the Netherlands, *The Photographer* was to combine three separate events, in the manner of a Victorian entertainment, into one exciting whole—a play, a "lecture," and a ballet, all dealing loosely with Muybridge's life and work. At its debut in Amsterdam last year, however, *The Photographer* proved a confusing hodgepodge of theatrical images and effects, a confusion that bedevils even the redone version, which played at BAM in October and will tour the country this coming spring. It's only in the third act, a movement dance section choreographed by David Gordon, that Glass's exhilarating music and what is happening onstage come together. As one dancer twists, turns, and postures in direct imitation of Muybridge's freeze-frame action photographs, the rest of the company swirls and eddies across the stage. All the while, Glass's music sweeps along in one huge, amplified wave of sound that builds and builds while the audience, caught up in the tidal force, waits breathlessly for the climax. Then, suddenly, there is silence—and euphoric release.

THERE'S NO denying the impact of Glass's music. Critics are right, however, to be suspicious of music that is so beholden to a different culture—that reflects, in its cyclic patterns, a completely different, meditative approach to life. Can a Westerner ever get beyond the simple surface effects of such an Eastern-oriented style, ever become more than a musical tourist? There are other valid criticisms, as Glass's more thoughtful fans acknowledge. To a certain extent, Glass's music is anti-intellectual. It is emotion-first, feel-good music that depends, at least for part of its effect, on high amplification and a glittery, glassy surface. It is also fairly limited harmonically: as Andrew Porter once pointed out, there's a surfeit of consonance and not enough dissonance. At its worst, it can be boring and slick, as in the pastel-pop sound of much of *Glassworks*, Glass's first "commercial" album. It's no wonder, then, that academic composers chafe when trendy Europeans treat the music as the best thing to come out of America in years.

Just because Glass is chic and some-

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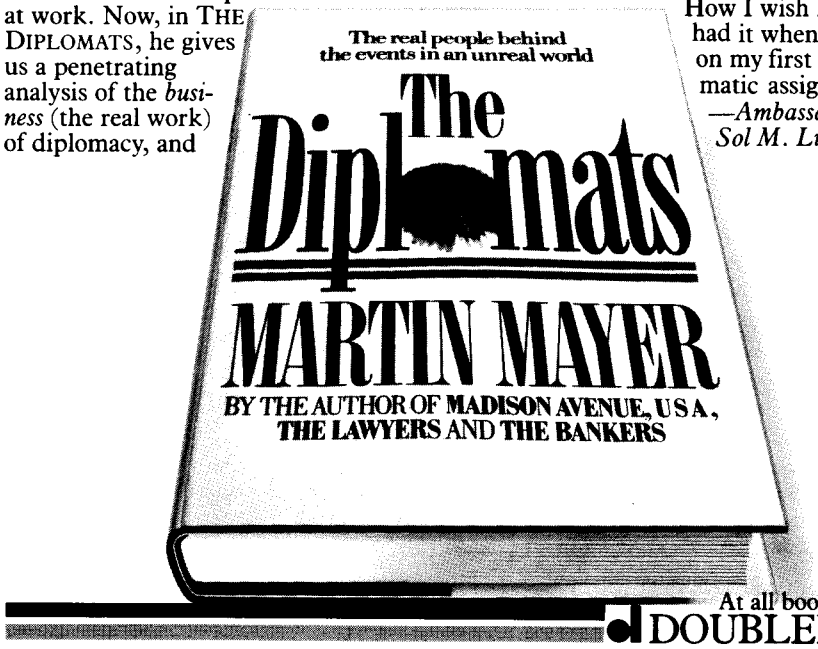
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what limited, however, is no reason to dismiss him. Even if minimalism proves, in the end, an artistic cul-de-sac (a fate that may easily befall serialism as well), it will have left a considerable mark on contemporary music. Glass and the other minimalists began by breaking the sterile lockstep of serialism and bringing a whole new, rock-influenced generation of listeners to classical music. He has produced lyrical, listenable operas in an age of all-but-unsingable ones. He has dared to write "pretty" music, once more focusing attention not simply on how music is structured but on how it sounds—how certain keys reflect certain moods. One indirect result of all this may well be the "return to romanticism"—or at least to tonality—that is now in the air in the classical world. Conrad Cummings, for one, lists Glass as one of the main influences on his new tonal opera *Eros and Psyche*. And while Glass's music does not give you what Western music does—the varying themes, the changes in dynamics and tempo—it gives you something else, the experience of sitting back and letting a music carry you along on a shimmering wave of sound.

The enemies of minimalism would like nothing better than to see it fade away. Yet not only has it survived the 1960s but it is flourishing. A second generation of talented young composers, among them Californians Paul Dresher and John Adams, have taken amplification and repetitive structures and produced their own original music. What is more, minimalism is at the heart of today's mixed-media theater. The multimedia collaborations of Glass and Robert Wilson, or Glass and choreographer Lucinda Childs, or Paul Dresher with conceptual-theater director George Coates—or, on another front, Laurie Anderson's quirky performances, accompanied by a minimal music of her own—are arguably the most exciting strain in theater today. Minimalism is heading in myriad directions. "What we have evolving in New York now is a hybrid performance music scene," Glass has said. "It's not clear whether it's new wave, or experimental, and it seems that all those linguistic descriptions have become useless as all these styles have merged."

And there is, finally, Glass's own evolution. For proof of the new richness and expansion of his music, one need only listen to the marvelous score of *Koyaanisqatsi*. The beginning is solemn and dark: a deep voice chants "Koyaanisqatsi" over low, hushed organ notes. What follows is almost as varied as a conventional symphonic work. There's a bright section in which treble voices rise over a cheery back-and-forth doodling in the bass; the ominous sound of a bass drone, a distant rumble that, without warning, bursts forth in a terrifying blast of organ and wail of brass; a lovely, elegiac passage for French horns. Most moving of all is the final section, in which high, ghostly arpeggios on the organ and the unaccompanied voices of a choir give a feeling of religious stillness. Then, at the very end, the deep bass voice, chanting "Koyaanisqatsi," is heard once again. The effect is of some otherworldly ritual, mysterious and half-glimpsed. That is classical Glass.

TAME WILDER

The Enthusiast: A Life of Thornton Wilder by Gilbert A. Harrison

(Ticknor & Fields, 403 pp., $19.95)

In the historical world of American letters, Thornton Wilder exists as a large and worrisome puzzle. Gilbert A. Harrison's highly readable and well-paced biography will not solve the puzzle, but it provides enough information and passages from letters and journals for others to have a shot at doing so.

The life—1897 to 1975—is here in sometimes crackling detail. There were the earliest years in Wisconsin; then a period when Thornton and his several siblings were shunted back and forth between China (where the father was consul-general in Hong Kong) and Berkeley, California; the undergraduate days at Oberlin and later at Yale; prodigious reading, indefatigable playgoing, and furious fits of writing. A tour of Europe and a stint of teaching at Lawrenceville School in New Jersey led to the production of Wilder's first novel, *The Cabala*, a misty tale of (more or less) modern Rome that was published in 1926 and quite well received. A year later, just as Wilder turned 30, there appeared *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the craftily told saga of five travelers who are plunged to their death in a Peruvian gulf in the year 1714, and of the assorted destinies that brought them together at that moment, on that crossing. It was a stupendous success, both in England and America, earning a clamor of acclaim, and, within a matter of months, $20,000 in royalties.

Wilder on the spot became a person of international renown. He lectured all across the land, went mountain climbing with the former heavyweight boxing champion and devout Shakespearian Gene Tunney, visited with Gertrude Stein in Chicago and with Sigmund Freud outside of Vienna. His reputation held firm through two further novels in the 1930s, though the first of them, *The Woman of Andros*, based on a Roman comedy by Terence, was subjected to a thundering attack by the proletarian writer Michael Gold in THE NEW REPUBLIC.

Gold, having searched the second century B.C. novel in vain for signs of the current depression and the class struggle, described the work as "an historic junk shop" that contained no more than "a daydream of homosexual figures in graceful gowns moving archaically among the lillies." Wilder's defenders did not rise to such colorful rhetoric, but a good fight—one that served to articulate genuinely colliding values—ensued in the magazine's pages until Edmund Wilson, the literary editor, called things to a halt. (Gilbert Harrison, who was the influential senior editor of THE NEW REPUBLIC for a good many years, recounts this episode with a kind of relish.) The second novel of the period was *Heaven's My Destination*, an excellent comic performance in which Wilder turned back strategically to the contemporary American scene and the great native tradition of the adventures and mishaps of the virtuous boob.

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His literary standing and income were enormously enhanced by two plays, *Our Town* in 1937 and *The Skin of Our Teeth* in 1942—both additions, so far as one can now tell, to the small repertoire of a living American theater. No professional undertaking by Wilder over the next three decades would quite match those preceding achievements. There were three more novels, at least one of which, *The Ides of March* (1948), is worth revisiting; there were dramatic efforts that never got completed or didn't quite come off. Wilder's finest literary work in the postwar epoch was in criticism: a series of lectures on notable strangenesses in American literature, given at Harvard in 1950-51, and a number of essays on drama and dramatists—Oedipus, Goethe, Shaw, his own work. (These, with pieces on Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and a few more, were collected in an admirable volume in 1979, *American Characteristics and Other Essays*.) The great popular success of this era was the musical comedy *Hello Dolly!* derived from Wilder's play of 1954, *The Matchmaker*, itself a revision of Wilder's earlier (1938) play, *The Merchant of Yonkers*, based on a comedy by a Viennese playwriter that had been taken from a play by an English writer. Wilder liked such tangled ancestry, though in fact he had no part in the making of *Hello Dolly!* (from which he nonetheless banked $300,000).

THE biographical narrative, which proceeds throughout at a pretty rapid clip, manages at times to imitate the breathless crowded nature of the life:

> It was a dizzy whirl, and we get a sense of its dizziness by sampling some of Thornton's extracurricular engagements in Chicago [where he was then teaching at President Robert Maynard Hutchins's invitation], New York and New Haven from February 4 to April 19, 1933. He lunched with Mrs. Murray Crane of *the* Cranes, Alexander Woolcott, Jed Harris, Noel Coward and with Edward Levi, a student of his and future president of the University of Chicago; dined with Sybil Colefax visiting from London, the blind and paralyzed playwright Edward Sheldon, Marc Connelly, Robert Frost, the Goodspeeds and the Hutchinses (for Henry Luce); had evenings at the theater . . . attended play rehearsals and a Vladimir Horowitz recital; visited hospitalized Dorothy Parker; drank with Willa Cather, Woolcott and Clarence Day; lectured at Yale, the Academy of Music in Brooklyn and the Chicago

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1963–Diem coup successful. (see June 30)

1972–The *Washington Post* reports on White House study requiring "manufacture and installation of special FM receivers in every home radio and television set, boat and automobile, which could be automatically turned on by the government to contact every citizen, whether awake or asleep," and called for "full coverage, 100 percent of the population."

1982–*Detroit Free Press* reports a Santa Clara, Ca., chief parole officer proposes attaching computers to parolees to monitor their whereabouts and also the use of electronic implants to control violent criminals.

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> Art Institute on Dante; heard T. S. Eliot read his poetry; showed up at an exhibit of Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings; saw Lady Colefax embark for England. . . .

Seventeen years later, when Wilder is again in Europe, the biographical camera follows him faithfully as he consorts with the Oliviers in London, Alice B. Toklas in Paris, Max Beerbohm in Rapallo and, back in London, with Noel Coward, Lord Wavell, T. S. Eliot, Barbara Ward, Lord Birkenhead, Sacheverell Sitwell, and Sir Shane Leslie.

TO BE SURE, it is part of Harrison's intention to show Wilder careening from place to place, country to country, platform to platform, celebrity to celebrity—instead of withdrawing to some private place where (as he once vowed to do) he could "gaze directly at the boundless misery of the human situation, collective and individual," as a way of rekindling his sluggish creative energy. But the effect is to overwhelm us with facts that presumably speak for themselves, and names that are presumably self-identifying. There is the sense at times of reading one-half of a collaborative biography, the co-author of which will be supplying the analyses and interpretations.

Not that *The Enthusiast* is entirely devoid of authorial intervention. The best of it occurs in a ten-page chapter on Wilder's erotic makeup, where it is disclosed that he probably had a series of homosexual encounters with a young professor of English in the late 1930s, and possibly with another less closely identified male. Harrison handles the matter with exemplary grace and tact, drawing on the considerable testimony of Wilder's friends—Glenway Westcott volubly among them—that any physical contact was distasteful to him, that the sessions must have been hurried and awkward, and followed by remorse, and that Wilder if anything was nonsexual. Wilder's particular kind of fondness for women and his alertness to the homosexual motif in literature—especially in Melville—are elements in a familiar pattern that Harrison makes evident but does not belabor.

As to Wilder's parents, his biographer obviously feels little impulse to probe beneath the available evidence. The father, Amos Parker Wilder, was a queer mix of vigor and self-defeat; he was a bit of a bully ("an unconscious fascist," in Thornton's phrase), and he had an old-fashioned puritanical distrust of the theater, with a practical distrust of literature as a career. None of this had any visible impact on his younger son. One of the most charming moments in the narrative, meanwhile, is the 26-year-old Thornton's proposal to his mother, writing to the former Isabella Niven from Lawrenceville School:

> Madame, although I doubt whether you are old enough to be my mother, I solemnly propose it to you: will you be my mother? "Do you take this man to be your importunate son, to scold and indulge, to tease and provoke, so help you, Madame de Sevigné?"

Wilder's feminine ideal, as Harrison says, was maternal and was his mother; but the biographer is wise not to press the point with an individual who could pen so lovingly parodic a letter.

Elsewhere, though, speculation might be in order. Wilder, for instance, was a twin—his identical brother was stillborn and Thornton barely survived. Did this cast no shadow over the maturing imagination? The unhappy character named Esteban in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* seeks to hang himself after the death of his twin brother: should something be made of that? During the whole course of Wilder's childhood and adolescence, he was shifted about between hemispheres and homes; what were the traceable consequences of this? My own sense is that the long-range effect was a generally healthy one, and that the early experience can explain Wilder's easy cosmopolitanism and his at-homeness anywhere on the planet. Others, of course, may see in it the source of an incurable restlessness and an air of being at home nowhere on the globe.

BUT IT IS Thornton Wilder's literary identity and status that, for this reader, the biography does not sufficiently grapple with. Very little literary criticism is offered; Harrison contents himself with observing from time to time that Wilder's recurring theme was "a celebration of life in the knowledge of death's inevitability." This is perfectly sound, and in any event it is not necessarily critical analysis that we feel the lack of: rather, a facing up to the questions that have perplexed Wilder-watchers for nearly sixty years. How serious and engaged a writer is he? What is his measurable magnitude? His enormous literary earnings, his unmatched worldwide popularity: are these indications of a culpable pandering to middle-level taste, and should he be denied a lofty canonical ranking because of his commercial triumphs?

There is the question, too, of his habitual borrowings. In addition to the debts to Terence and the Viennese dramatist, Wilder was beholden to Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* for a play written at Yale, vaguely to Euripides for *The Alcestiad*, an unsuccessful venture of 1955, and to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* for *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Acknowledging the latter in the preface to a volume of his plays, Wilder put the whole business—"originality" versus "derivation"—in a proper perspective: "I should be very happy if, in the future, some author should feel similarly indebted to any work of mine. Literature has always more resembled a torch race than a furious dispute among heirs."

Harrison suggests that Wilder's failure to win full critical recognition was and is due to his sturdy, if embattled, optimism, his faith in faith; a posture that set him apart from the abyss-leaning tendency of the modern temper. He really was a buoyant being, and for me he rings least true when he is talking modernistically about boundless human misery, and most true when, for example, he tried hard late in life to work up a mood of resentment about a recent biography of him, but had to confess that "(as with Doctor Johnson's friend) 'cheerfulness is always breaking in.' " But the basic issue, most likely, has lain elsewhere.

Francis Ferguson, the redoubtable analyst of the dramatic tradition, wrote some years ago that

> Wilder occupies a unique position, between the Great Books and Parisian sophistication one way, and the entertainment industry the other way, and in our culture, this region, though central, is a dark and uninhabitable no man's land.

To this I would add, as corollary, that what worries those of us who take pleasure in Wilder's plays and novels, and who recognize his cultivation and sophistication, is a sense of effortlessness on his part, of an absence of that terrible strain and struggle we suppose inherent in the creative (as against the entertainer's) task.

Perhaps we can tap Henry James for a pertinent definition and distinction. When he was first encountering the Renaissance masters in the Venice of 1869,

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Henry wrote his brother William that Veronese had a perfect unity and "placidity" of talent, that there was in him "not a whit of struggle, nor fever, nor longing for the unobtainable." Henry had a similar reaction to the paintings of Raphael in Florence and Rome: Raphael had a purity of genius that was "unmodified by the struggles of development" and of experience. The contrast with Michelangelo was fundamental. Looking at Raphael's charming tableaux, Henry said, "you don't in the least feel about his figures as about many others—M. Angelo's especially—that they *might* have been ugly." What Raphael lacked was what Michelangelo possessed above all other artists: a sort of ultimate energy of statement. This "energy—positiveness—courage—call it what you will" was the "primordial quality in the supremely superior genius . . . [and] makes the real man of action in art."

Wilder knew that there were the two major kinds of artists in every generation, and that in his time he was of the tamer, less fevered, less driven and driving breed. But there were compensations. "As I view the work of my contemporaries," he wrote in the introductory essay quoted from above, "I seem to feel that I am exceptional in one thing—I give (don't I) the impression of having enormously enjoyed it." The enjoyment is infectious; and it is no small or transitory thing to be a Thornton Wilder, if you can't be a William Faulkner.

R. W. B. Lewis

R. W. B. Lewis, a TNR contributing editor, is professor of American Studies at Yale. He is at work on a narrative biography of the James family.

The Pull Of Public Life

Politics in the Ancient World by M. I. Finley

(Cambridge University Press, 152 pp., $27.50, $9.95 paper)

The city-states of the ancient world were, with the exception of the Roman republic in its later years, very small. But they have loomed large in the history of political thought. Indeed, politics itself—defined by Moses Finley in this lively and enlightening book as an activity through which "binding decisions are reached by discussion and argument and ultimately by voting"—is a city-state invention. Ever since that invention, men and women who value political life have looked back to the Greek and Roman city as a model homeland. There they would have lived, had they not been born Italian, French, German, or English, and spoken in the assemblies, served on the juries, fought beside their fellow citizens. There they would have enjoyed the pleasures of political freedom, public spirit, civic friendship, and patriotic emotion.

Not every political thinker, however, accepted this view of the ancient city. Thomas Hobbes disparaged the "Greek and Roman anarchies," with their endless tumult. Benjamin Constant explored the differences between ancient and modern liberty and opted for the second. But the view was pervasive and it still is, that political life reached an early culmination in Greece and Rome and has never been the same since. Once, long ago, discussion and argument, as well as voting, were the ordinary activities of ordinary citizens. Today we are more accustomed to an intermittent politics, weakly competing with private absorptions and general apathy. "The people in assembly?" asked Rousseau. "I shall be told [that] is a mere chimera. It is so today, but two thousand years ago it was not so. Has man's nature changed?"

In recent years there has been some effort among classical scholars to undercut the standard view of the city-state by stressing the extent of elite dominance (a belated response to elitist theories in political science). Perhaps the people came to the assemblies, but what they did there was mostly to ratify the decisions of their social betters. The

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mass of citizens was almost as ignorant and incompetent as Plato, the first critic of political life, made them out to be. Plato was wrong, however, to think that politicians pandered to them: the mass is always manipulated. Anyway, the citizen body, since it excluded slaves and women, constituted only a minority of the population. Even at its democratic best, the city-state was a male oligarchy.

Finley's book is a welcome corrective to these kinds of revisionism. With skill and sophistication, it restates the standard view. But it also goes beyond the standard view to ask why politics was so interesting to ordinary citizens and why that interest never extended to the overthrow of the social elite. Throughout the political history of the ancient world, until the moment when the public space for argument was shut down by military dictatorships and imperial governments, the demos co-existed with the notables. In an important sense, politics was the struggle between these two groups, though argument and discussion were easiest during periods when some rough compromise had been reached.

The startling innovation that made city-state politics possible was "the incorporation of peasants, craftsmen, and shopkeepers into the political community . . . as citizens." Once such people were inside, the sharing of power became a crucial question, and a long and fruitful period of institutional experimentation was begun. Despite the large number of people who were still outside, "rule by the few" or "rule by the many" was, Finley insists, a meaningful choice. "The freedom and the rights that the [rival] factions claimed for themselves were worth fighting for." The quality of everyday life, the safety, prosperity, and dignity of the citizens, were really at issue, and different outcomes made a difference. The victory of the demos, even its partial victory, led to a degree of popular participation that is indeed without parallel in our own world.

Finley develops at some length the example of the Athenian Council of 500, a kind of executive committee which planned the business of the larger Assembly. Council members were selected by lot from among all the citizens (though individuals could refuse to allow their names to go forward). The term of service was one year and no man could serve more than twice in his lifetime. In fact, fewer than 3 percent of the known members actually served a second term. "In any decade," Finley calculates, "something between a fourth and a third of the total citizenry over thirty would have been Council members." That means they would have been available for daily meetings during the course of the year, and on full-time service for a tenth of the year. Out of office, they must have been competent and knowledgeable participants in the Assembly debates. Limited literacy (the city-state was an oral culture) made the elites necessary in those debates; knowledge of documents was one of the sources of aristocratic authority. Yet ordinary citizens shared in the knowledge of events. How many Americans today have anything like the political experience of Athenian councillors?

ORDINARY Romans were in this regard more like Americans than like Athenians: unlikely to have shared in executive responsibility or to have served on important committees. The success of the Roman elites in constraining popular participation is linked by Finley to Rome's almost continuous campaigns of conquest. War was a partial substitute for politics—a popular and, even for the plebs, a rational enterprise, because success meant that there was new land available for distribution. During the last two centuries of the republic "the median of adult males [fighting] in any year was 13 percent, rising as high as 35 percent in some years. . . staggering numbers, probably without parallel in history." These were citizen soldiers, and though the body of citizens could not control Rome's wars as the demos controlled Athens' wars, it did have an important, if limited, constitutional place in Roman decisionmaking. And plebian citizens sometimes were able, extraconstitutionally, by demonstration and riot and resistance to conscription, to influence the votes of the Senate.

Why did they bother? Why did Roman citizens vote and demonstrate? Why were Athenian peasants and craftsmen, busy earning a living, ready to devote so much time to the juries, the Council, and the Assembly? The answer likely to spring to our minds, as it springs to Finley's, is that material interests were at stake. Life in the ancient city-state was always precarious; "a large sector of the citizenry. . . lived on the margin of a subsistence level, in constant danger of falling below." Hence the distribution of land, debt bondage, colonization, public subsidy, war and military service were crucial issues. And the nature of the regime, the way power was shared, was crucial because of them. "No man," said a client of Lycias, "is an oligarch or a democrat by nature; it is out of interest that he supports a regime."

BUT THE question about participation has received another answer among many historians and political theorists. Finley quotes a contemporary German scholar, writing particularly about Athens: "politics was so much a way of being (*Sein*), a way of life, that it could not have been a means to satisfy interests from other sectors of life." This view is implicit in Rousseau and in one strand of democratic theory since Rousseau. The highest form of political action is only possible when politics is fully autonomous—like virtue, its own reward. Americans are most likely to encounter such views in the writings of Hannah Arendt, for whom the Greek city is the great Other, the vital alternative to modern politics and society. "No activity that served only the purpose of making a living," Arendt wrote in *The Human Condition*, ". . . was permitted to enter the political realm." Politics had intrinsic value for the Greeks; political action was something very close to an end in itself. The "instrumentalization of action," an awful phrase for what Arendt takes to be an awful process, is one of the disasters of modernity. In Athenian politics, as she describes it, the issues were always secondary to the competition. It is "the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring up against others that underlies the concept of politics prevalent in the city-states." One acted in order to be seen acting, to make an "appearance in the human world."

Though he never mentions Arendt, Finley is impatient with this sort of thing—perhaps too impatient, for Arendt's argument surely captures something of the spirit of aristocratic politics. Arendt's argument is largely drawn, in fact, from aristocratic or pro-aristocratic literature (there is, among the ancients, no other kind). Just as surely, however, Arendt misses the spirit of demotic and plebian politics. I don't mean to say, nor does Finley, that ordinary Athenians felt no pride in

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serving on the Council and displaying their political competence. But when they argued, say, for a moratorium on debts, they were not thinking of display but of interest. "The polis," writes Arendt, "was for the Greeks . . . first of all their guarantee against the futility of individual life." No, the polis, like every political community, was first of all their guarantee against the dangers of individual life. What was special in the polis—it is rare enough even today—was the ability of peasants and craftsmen to seek remedies for those dangers through "discussion, argument . . . and voting." And that is a sufficient reason for our admiration.

Finley's Greeks (and Romans) are more like ourselves than Arendt's are. But it is not his purpose merely to assure us that human nature has not changed. He is keenly aware of all the ways in which the political culture of the ancient city-state—marvelously adapted to intimacy and immediacy—is different from our own. Few historians have his capacity for drawing us into an alien world. The finest feature of his work, here as in his book on the ancient economy and in many of his essays on slavery, is that he does this without pretending to any direct knowledge of that world; nor does he fall into the colorful style, as if he had been there. He shows us his sources, often fragmentary and obscure, worries about their interpretation, carries on a running argument with other scholars—and yet never loses touch with his lay readers. Amateurs of the classical world, like this reviewer, will finish this book feeling that they have been initiated into professional knowledge. Though *Politics in the Ancient World*, like all Cambridge University Press books, is terribly overpriced, it is a bargain still.

MICHAEL WALZER

Michael Walzer, a TNR contributing editor, is the author of *Just and Unjust Wars*, and, most recently, of *Spheres of Justice* (Basic Books).

DIARY OF A REVOLUTIONARY

The Death of Che Guevara by Jay Cantor

(Knopf, 577 pp., $17.95)

In the most successful scenes of Jay Cantor's first novel, *The Death of Che Guevara*, Che conducts a classic guerrilla insurgency in the Bolivian jungle with unsettling results. There are only forty-four men in his National Liberation force, but numbers, he knows, don't matter. He and Fidel started a revolution in the Cuban Sierras with an army of sixteen. The important thing is to show leadership, to be audacious (Fidel's favorite word), and above all to win victories—even tiny victories. The most insignificant triumph won't seem insignificant to the oppressed peasants. Every deed against the state will attract the peasants' respect, and when the state begins to look vulnerable, the peasants will reach for their weapons. Then there will be plenty of numbers.

Che ambushes army patrols and captures remote jungle villages. He assembles the peasants at the point of a gun—so they can say later they were coerced—and harangues them in the village center. They should seize destiny with their own hands. They should understand history, should understand that imperialism can be defeated by a worldwide movement. They should come to the aid of embattled Vietnam. And they shouldn't be daunted by their own weakness. He himself is a weak man; asthma and arthritis cripple him, and at times he can barely walk, as the peasants can see. And yet armed struggle has made him a powerful figure and will do the same for them.

The peasants listen, and go home. He ambushes more soldiers, captures another hamlet, delivers the same harangue. The peasants listen intently, they hang on his words. But they don't

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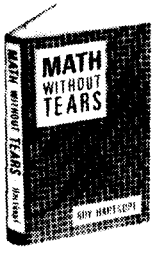

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understand him in quite the way he intends. They see that he's powerful, but his power strikes them as supernatural. He turns away bullets with twigs, he can't be killed except by a magic ax. They understand that he seeks a vast social change, but they picture this as the millenarian expectation that they have always harbored. The millennium requires no participation from them. Heroes like Che will effect it. They listen and go home.

In one village he almost seems to get through to them. The mayor brings out a copy of the *Communist Manifesto*, which he reveres. The guerrillas are ecstatic. But the mayor's Marxism turns out to be as magical as anything else in the jungle. He worships the *Manifesto* for its mention of the "specter"—the specter that haunts Europe!

Bolivia is a disaster for Che; it's his demise, and the reason is that here, in the jungle, he has found a society unlike Cuba or anything he's ever imagined, a society that lies outside a radical's view of the world. It is the kind of place we know from Gárcia Márquez, a place of superstition and mystery, and nothing is going to push it into modern life. Not even the most audacious of revolutionary deeds will provoke these most primitive of oppressed masses. There's not going to be any peasant rebellion. There's only going to be death for the revolutionaries who stranded themselves in such a godforsaken outpost.

What does Jay Cantor mean to suggest with these dramatic scenes? Is he hinting that third world revolution as a whole has failed—that the Marxist picture of the masses under imperialism is false and can only lead to no good? *The Death of Che Guevara* is a huge novel—the Bolivian campaign comprises only the second half—and in the first half everything seems to push the revolution toward success. Che learns radical theory from his middle-class parents, commits himself to Gandhianism, observes how democratic radicals get decimated by the C.I.A. (the book is properly hard on Yankee imperialism), encounters Fidel, helps spark the guerrilla movement in Cuba. But somewhere in the Bolivian jungle this political momentum comes to a halt. Suddenly it's the revolution and not the state that appears vulnerable.

COMING:

Robert B. Reich on politics and productivity.

CANTOR scatters hints that the revolution's soul, not just its military strength, is at risk. He never provides a full picture of Fidelista Cuba, but his background glances suggest that all is not well. And suddenly at the tail end of the book he glances at a worse place, at Cambodia, and indicates that Khmer atrocities are somehow a culmination of third world insurgency. The global revolution has led to mass destruction. A surprise conclusion: the entire book, the adoration of Che, the presumption in favor of revolution, turn out to be ironies. How bitter does he mean these ironies to be? He doesn't specify; he prefers ambiguity.

In any case, *The Death of Che Guevara* is certainly extravagant in scope, and it's equally extravagant in technique. The novel is composed of the imagined diaries and memoirs of Che, as pieced together by his comrade Ponco after Che's death, with a memoir and commentary by Ponco, plus excerpts from other guerrilla diaries, a couple of long poems, two plays, a screenplay, a Dos Passos-like "newsreel" written in portentous tones, and some typographical tricks. The whole thing is supposed to create a web of voices and recollections in which each aspect comments on the others.

Unfortunately Cantor, who has a gift for abstract thought and the psychology of politics, exhibits a far smaller gift for inventing characters. Everyone sounds the same. Ponco never does come into focus, which is a damning flaw since he is the figure who stands directly between book and reader. Che himself is imperfectly defined, apart from his political evolution. He's too caught up in himself to be a proper narrator, too indecisive. His every thought pauses halfway out the door, runs back for an extra doubt, and collapses in confusion. You wouldn't expect a charismatic warrior chief to be like this. The level of artistry can be seen in an exchange with Ponco:

> "I'm going to write a book," Ponco said.
>
> "I'm sure you'll be better at it than I am." Glutinous self-pity: I hadn't been able to write since our conversation yesterday. It haunted my hand. All that I left out, the smell of the people, the fear I felt on that truck in the Andes (no shock absorbers, every bump slammed my bones against cold metal), going downhill, around curves, bags and people like bags falling on my legs. Or something else, I don't know what, something lost.

Which is very bad, and sometimes it's even worse, as in the following incoherent rumination on the next page:

> I could tell from the unsettled feeling in my stomach, something rounder than greasy rice, that I couldn't go back to work yet. I wouldn't hit the target (get my man?). I needed the confidence that some force (another presence? History?) guided my hand, kept me from lying, would make a false world, false word I mean, shake apart. (False world? Like this one: imperialism is a lying author.) Ponco went outside.

There's a lot more in the same rounder-than-greasy-rice spirit. The poems, the plays, the screenplay make hard sledding. Only the jungle war passages read a bit better, and this one success offers a clue to what's wrong with the book. The jungle war passages pretty much follow the action: guerrillas chase the army, the army chases guerrillas, Che harangues the masses, the masses act weird. There's no room, or only a little, for inarticulate stammerings or flights of poetic fanciness; the action must speak for itself. In these passages the author maintains a degree of self-discipline. It's when the action slows down, which is most of the time, that his self-restraint goes to pieces.

Cantor has put an immense amount of labor into *The Death of Che Guevara*. He's worked wonders of research. No one can say he hasn't thought the book through or has shied away from important issues, and I'm sure many people on this basis alone will admire his achievement. But in the end the book comes to resemble one of those third world dictatorships where the regime is badly beset by the consequences of its own grandiosity, by the lack of critical judgment, and by the flood tides of illiteracy.

PAUL BERMAN

Paul Berman is a freelance writer and critic who lives in New York City.

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Of Phantoms And Faith

The Summoning
by Robert Towers

(Harper & Row, 336 pp., $15.95)

For many contemporary Americans, the dirty little secret is no longer sex or even ambition but Christianity. For these highly educated, professional people—many of them living in the Northeast or on the West Coast—an old-fashioned religious experience, of the kind which earlier generations understood and even pursued—would be at best embarrassing and at worst a personal and social disaster. So, too, in much serious American fiction, which is written and published largely by and for this educated elite, Christian faith usually appears either as an endearing authorial affectation—something like Sebastian Flyte's teddy bear—or as a convenient explanation for every human failing from sexual inhibition to mass murder.

In fact, the title of Robert Towers's new novel, by design or not, is reminiscent of many pulp horror novels (with names like *The Howling, The Piercing, The Stabbing*) about dark goings-on among religious fanatics. But Towers, a respected critic who published two acclaimed novels in the 1960s, has charged at this taboo head-on, producing a spiritual suspense story that takes mighty risks and raises important questions about our literature and our lives. By virtue of its author, *The Summoning* will be accepted as serious fiction; it may help extend the narrow limits of the genre.

It is hard to imagine a less eager candidate for that old-time religion than Lawrence Hux, the protagonist of *The Summoning*. At 37, he is a successful executive with a large foundation in Manhattan. He has an apartment in the East 60s and an ex-wife and son on Riverside Drive. An honors graduate of the University of North Carolina, a former Princeton graduate student, he has thrived in that universe of skepticism, privilege, and self-satisfaction which is New York. But when we meet Hux in March of 1974, something has gone wrong: he is drinking too much, gaining weight, alienating his colleagues at the office, and stumbling into a series of increasingly desperate and humiliating sexual encounters. His friends worry that he is headed for a breakdown. Whether he has one, in a sense, is the central riddle posed by *The Summoning*.

One evening, half-asleep in his apartment, Larry Hux is visited by a ghost, "more real, more densely tangible, than any actual person he had met or spoken to all the previous day." It is his dead friend, Clark Helmholtz, a brilliant graduate student who was assassinated ten years earlier in Tupelo, Mississippi, during the "Freedom Summer" which, for many Northern white students who made the journey south, marked the high point of the civil rights movement. Helmholtz stands for a buried life which Hux has tried to forget—his troubled childhood in shabby-genteel North Carolina society, his early excitement about intellectual work and social change, his ambiguous love for his dead friend, his intense involvement with his lost family. Over and over the specter returns, until Hux comes to believe he is being called out of his empty new life and back to Mississippi.

In the guise of foundation business, Hux sets out to find and confront Clark's assassin, an aristocratic Mississippi physician named Claiborne Herne. Though the rest of the book—some three hundred pages—takes place in Mississippi and North Carolina, *The Summoning* is not a book about the South; indeed, the setting seems to be a crude blend of journalism, memory, and convenience. Towers is tone deaf about racial and ethnic terms, which seems particularly unfortunate in a book at least partially concerned with racism and civil rights. But this doesn't really matter: he is writing a travelogue of inner landscapes, and at this he is little short of masterful. Hux's quest leads to a shattering encounter with the Christian faith at its crudest. Is he crazy, or holy—or possessed by Satan? The results of Hux's "conversion" are horrifying, even satanic—or are they some form of divine justice?

Towers's two central characters are unforgettable. Larry Hux is a complex, exasperating, fascinating man, facing with little grace the realization that he has wasted a promising life. His inner mental, spiritual, and sexual disorder—and the harm it does to those around him—are vividly portrayed; Towers tells us just enough about his past to raise questions about the psychological roots of his religious experiences. Hux's counterpart, Claiborne Herne, is also nearly perfect: self-pitying, feeble, and defiant, his thoughts and speech capture brilliantly a certain type of Southern patrician which is now, at weary last, vanishing from the scene:

> I'll have you know, Brother Black, that I have always been a friend to the Nigra race and so was my father. They knew where they stood with us. We loved 'em, the good ones, and we protected them, got them out of scrapes, helped 'em where we could. [He tells Hux] . . . *You* think they can be educated, but goddamn it, I've lived with 'em longer and closer than you have, Brother Black, and I know from painful experience that a half-educated nigger is just about the most miserable—*and* the most dangerous—human bein' on the face of this earth.

MANY OF Towers's readers, I suspect, will take this book simply as the story of a nervous breakdown: an odd episode in which a troubled man falls afoul of a pernicious strain of American religion. In the book's final pages, Towers gives these readers a neat, psychobabblish explanation of what has happened to Hux. If taken literally, it would be as disappointing as the gimmick in so many fantasy stories in which the narrator wakes from a dream. But that ending can also be seen as a kind of mystical coda, an intentional escape route left for those who don't want to follow the story's meaning to the end. Parables, after all, do not preach; they are not meant to be understood or explained, but to trouble the hearer until, sometimes long afterward, they explode in the mind. *The Summoning* is a memorable and explosive parable, it is also contemporary fiction at its best and most serious.

Garrett Epps

Garrett Epps, the author of *The Shad Treatment* (Putnam's), is senior editor of *The North Carolina Independent*. He is at work on his second novel.

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TRB, *from page 6*

typical when asked about how to balance the budget. Mondale offered a list of suggestions that might save about $1.75 per fiscal year. Glenn inserted his budget deficit cartridge and reeled off an inane homily about how a family can't go out and buy a Cadillac if it doesn't have the money, and neither can a government, nosir.

The big news of the day (reporters had been alerted) was that Glenn unveiled, like a new model car, a new campaign charge: Mondale is weak on defense. Glenn listed various weapons he supports and Mondale doesn't, and others that Mondale now supports but once did not. Even in this nest of hawks, that one didn't fly. C.D.M.'s chairman, genial Ben Wattenberg (the man with the courage to say that there's nothing wrong with America), asked Glenn whether a politician might not "honorably" change his mind over the years. After all, it's been a decade since some of Mondale's sissy Senate votes. Anyway, Mondale now endorses a hefty increase in defense spending, even over present bloated levels. Mondale's weapon shopping list may be less than enough, or just enough, or (to introduce a novel possibility) utterly de trop, but Glenn will have a hard time convincing people that it represents "a fundamental lack of support for an adequate defense."

Mondale actually won the anti-Soviet rhetorical auction—bids began at "no illusion about the Soviet threat" (Mondale); "clear-eyed understanding . . . of our principal adversary" (Glenn)—with his assertion that the Soviet military buildup of the past twenty years has no defensive explanation and that Soviet leaders are "cynical and dangerous." Glenn offered the surprisingly sissy theory that the Soviet goal is "absolute security," explaining, in an unilluminating paraphrase of Lord Acton, that "the quest for *absolute* security is *absolutely* dangerous."

But Glenn's most bizarre literary reference was to F. Scott Fitzgerald. He quoted Fitzgerald's famous line (from, ahem, *The Crack Up*) that "the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in the mind at the same time," and went on to recommend this schizophrenia as "the test of a mature and responsible government."

Earth to Glenn. Earth to Glenn. Hello?

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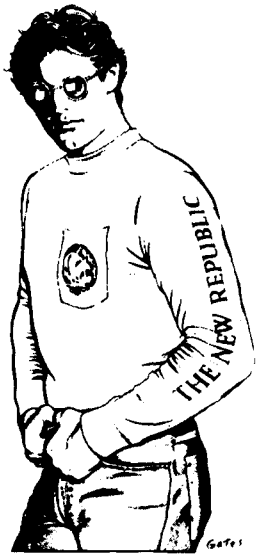

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

The Morning After

EVERYONE AT THE OFFICE the day after *The Day After* agreed that the scariest thing about the show was the appearance afterward of Secretary of State George Shultz. Not so much what he said—just his demeanor. This was exactly the opposite of what the Administration intended by selecting Shultz from its arsenal of spokesmen to deploy against the movie. Little Cap Weinberger is too ferrety and frightening. They could have tried whatshisname, you know, the latest National Security Adviser—I think they call him "Bud," which sounds friendly enough, but no one's going to be reassured by the sight of some fellow they've never heard of telling them he doesn't plan to start a nuclear war. It would only remind people that their fate lies in the hands of strangers. Shultz was supposed to seem calmly authoritative and avuncular. Instead, he seemed to be in about the same state as Jason Robards coming up on the last commercial. That is, half dead. Perhaps out of a concern not to appear jaunty, he gave all the signs of a man about to burst into uncontrollable sobs. I also found the Carter-style "roaring fire" backdrop unnerving. This has become a sure indication that somebody's about to tell you to take your medicine, and it's medicine you probably shouldn't take.

SHULTZ OFFERED the Administration line that the movie demonstrates that nuclear war is "unacceptable," thus lending support to President Reagan's plans [sic] for preventing it. ABC's position, similarly, was that the show merely heightened awareness of the peril without taking a stand on what to do about it. Many have said (even me) that everyone knows a nuclear war would be unpleasant, so what's the point? But there's a difference between knowing it and feeling it, so a reminder of this sort probably is useful. Henry Kissinger was at his most egomaniacal in the after-show gabfest, huffing and puffing that the movie was redundant because he had written a book on the subject thirty years ago. Wailing about the horror without suggesting a cure is not really neutral, since it inevitably feeds defeatist and appeasing impulses (or at least it certainly fed mine). But that aside, I thought *The Day After* was pretty scrupulous about not taking sides in the nuclear debate, with one exception. That exception was the President's postwar speech, heard by survivors huddled around a shortwave radio, about how America had not surrendered and freedom was preserved, etc. This was clearly intended to seem ironic, with the necessary implication that we are fools to worry more about protecting our freedom than about the risk of nuclear war. A truly responsible network, I supose, would have run *The Day After* back-to-back with an equally bleak portrayal of Kansas City under Soviet rule, with a "900" number we could all call later to settle the "better-red-or-dead" question once and for all.

ABC WAS JUST WALLOWING in its sense of responsibility all evening, with portentous announcements about not letting children watch, lists of books to read, promises of panel discussions, and so on. All this high-mindedness was undercut, though, at the end of the movie when the network attempted to usher in Ted Koppel at a peak of nationwide solemnity with a few lapidary sentences scrolled across a blank screen in dead silence. "In it's presentation" of this movie, said one, ABC takes no stand blah blah blah. That's right, *it's*. A real horror. Thank God we didn't let the children watch.

EVERYONE WAS EAGER to see who would advertise on this show, and those of us who harvest irony for a living were hoping for a rich crop. (Isn't it obscene to raise the the specter of "ring around the collar" when we face the ultimate tragedy of etc., etc. Ellen Goodman, take it away.) In the event, pickings were slim. The main sponsor was Commodore, cleverly capitalizing on the increased density of parental guilt particles in the atmosphere in order to sell people computers for their kids. The weirdest commercial was for a horror movie about a killer 1958 Plymouth. ("Body by Chrysler. Soul by Satan.") You would think that people immersed in thoughts about nuclear war would be harder rather than easier to engage concerning the dangers of a 1958 Plymouth, however ferocious. The promoters of the Plymouth movie may have figured (correctly) that *The Day After* precisely followed the conventions of horror movies: happy people engaged in innocent pastimes, a menace beyond their control, blood and guts, the end. I hope, in that case, that each showing of *Plymouth of Fury*, or whatever it's called, will be followed by a panel discussion about what each of us can do to keep our cars from misbehaving.

"MAYBE THE WHOLE WORLD has turned Jewish." This was Elie Weisel's typically solipsistic contribution to the panel discussion that followed the end of all civilized life. In general, though, the talk was illuminating and fun. Since it was an unpromising collection of gasbags (Weisel, Kissinger, astrocrooner Carl Sagan, Robert McNamara, General Scowcroft, William F. Buckley), credit must go to moderator Koppel, who kept them moving and kept them reasonably honest. The legend of Ted Koppel keeps growing, but many people are past thinking about the issues of the day by 11:30 P.M., when he usually performs. We demand more Koppel, and earlier Koppel.

MILITARY TRAGEDY to military comedy: invasion, 1983-style. First we send in troops, then we send in pollsters. Barely a week after American paratroopers dropped from the sky, CBS had conducted a poll in Grenada which determined that 91 percent were "glad the United States troops came to Grenada" and only 8 percent were not glad. An apathetic 1 percent said they had no opinion on what must surely be one of the more pressing public policy issues facing Grenadian citizens. This poll is allegedly accurate to "plus or minus 6 percent." Now really. Does the hubris of pollsters know no bounds? How would you answer if a stranger knocked on your door a week after a military invasion and asked how you liked it? According to a *New York Times* report, the questioners were Grenadians, and they scrupulously avoided revealing who wanted to know the answers. Somehow, though, I bet very few pollees suspected it might be the Cubans.

M.E.K.

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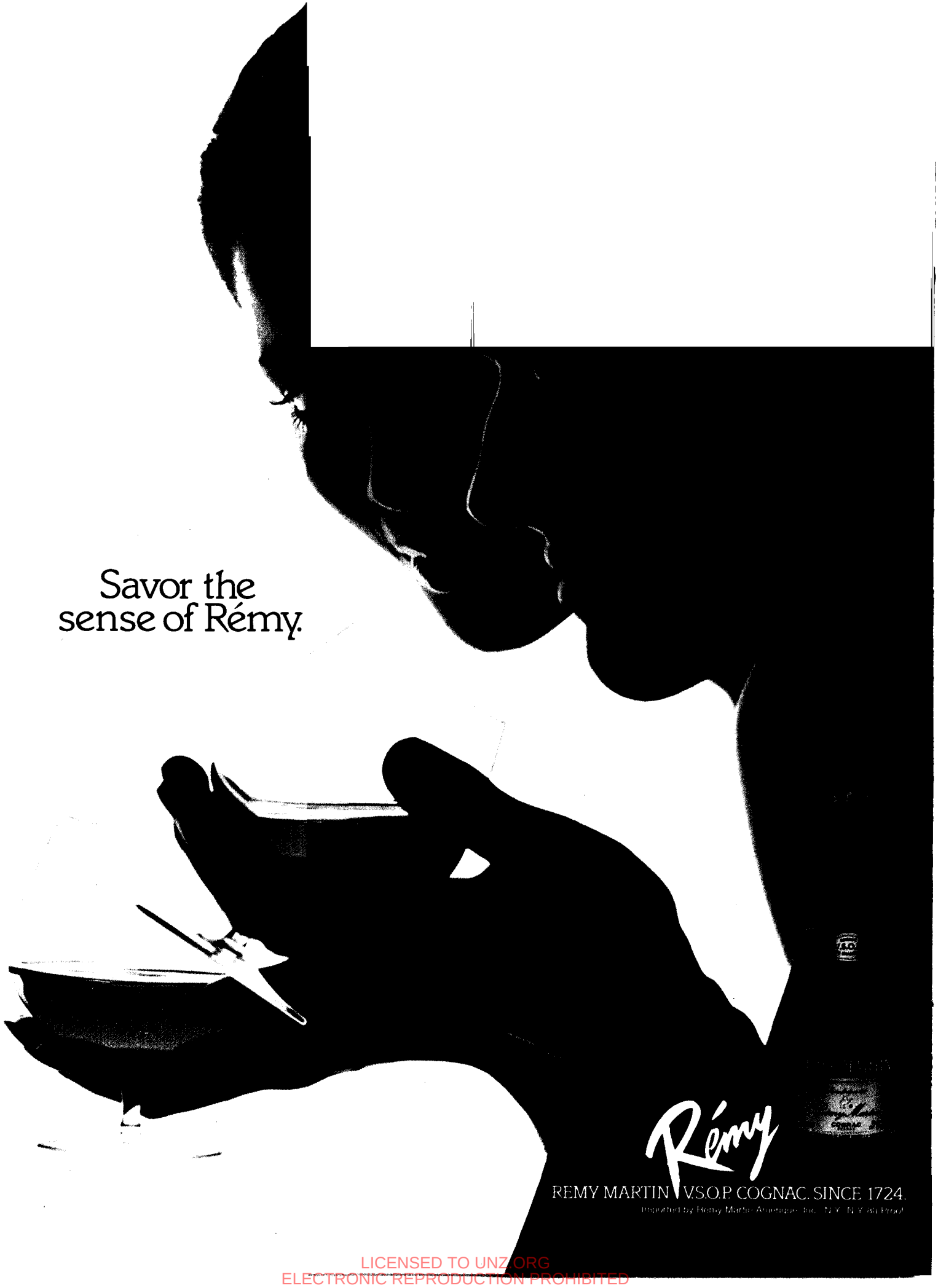

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